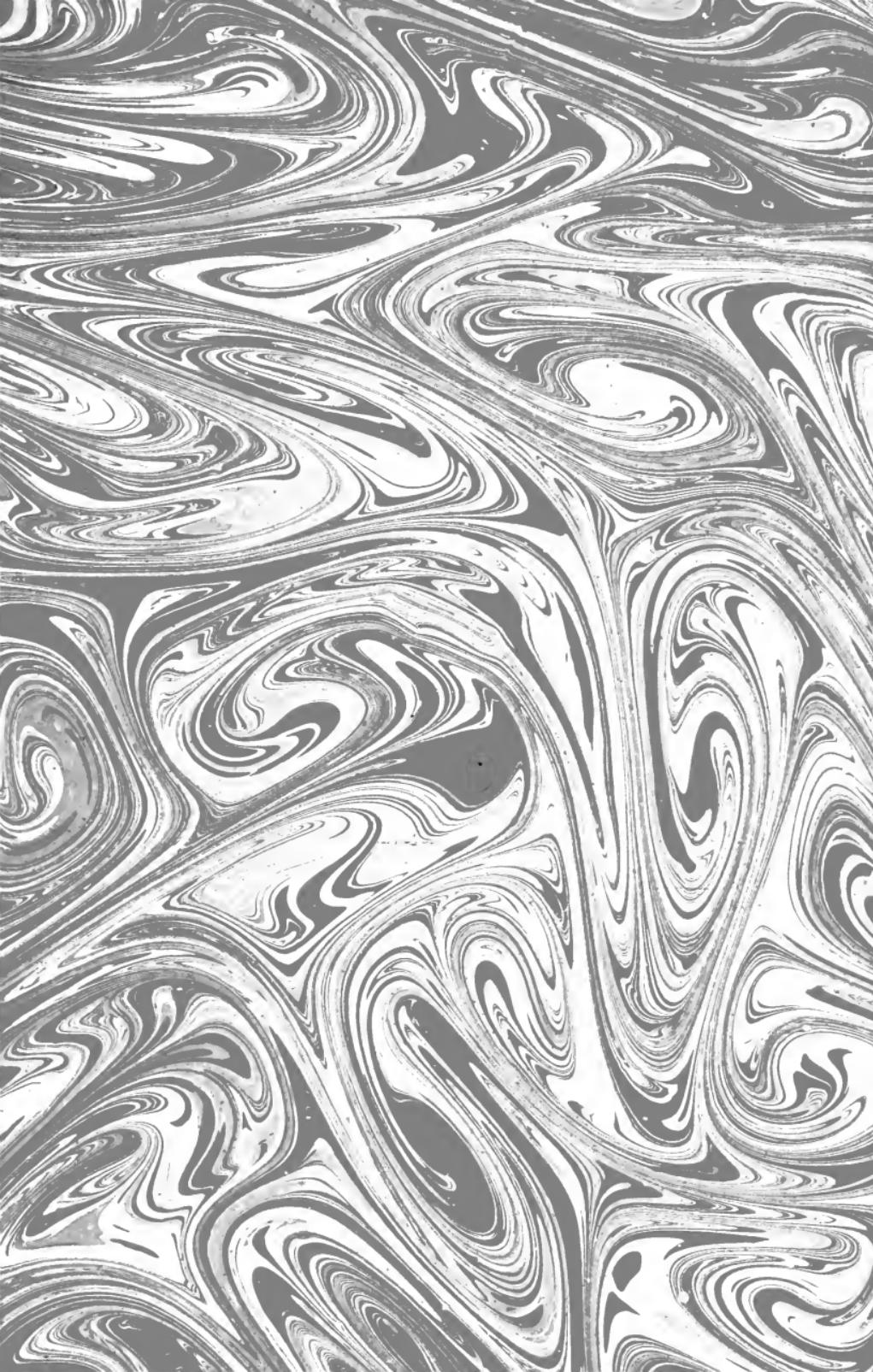


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THE SLAVE OF THE LAMP

VOL. II.



# THE SLAVE OF THE LAMP

BY

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AUTHOR OF 'YOUNG MISTLEY'

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II.

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THE  
SLAVE OF THE LAMP

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CHAPTER XV

ROOKS

THE London express rolled with stately deliberation into Brayport station. Mr. Bodery folded up his newspapers, reached down his bag from the netting, and prepared to alight. The editor of the ‘Beacon’ had enjoyed a very pleasant journey, despite broiling sun and searching dust. He knew the possibilities of a first class smoking-carriage—how to regulate the leeward window and chock off

the other with a wooden match borrowed from the guard.

He stepped from the carriage with the laboured sprightliness of a man past the forties, and a moment later Sidney Carew was at his side.

‘Mr. Bodery?’

‘The same. You are no doubt Mr. Carew?’

‘Yes. Thanks for coming. Hope it didn’t inconvenience you?’

‘Not at all,’ replied the editor, breaking his return ticket.

‘D——n!’ said Sidney suddenly.

He was beginning to rise to the occasion. He was one of those men who are usually too slack to burthen their souls with a refreshing expletive.

‘What is the matter?’ inquired Mr. Bodery gravely.

‘There is a man,’ explained Sidney hur-

riedly, ‘getting out of the train who is coming to stay with us. I had forgotten his existence. *Don’t look round!*’

Mr. Bodery was a Londoner. He did not look round. Nine out of ten country-bred people would have indulged in a stare.

‘Is this all your luggage?’ continued Sidney abruptly. He certainly was rising.

‘Yes.’

‘Then come along. We’ll bolt for it. He’ll have to get a fly, and that means ten minutes’ start if the porter is not officious and mulls things.’

They hurried out of the station and clambered into the dog-cart. Sidney gathered up the reins.

‘Hang it,’ he exclaimed. ‘What bad luck. There is a fly waiting. It is never there when you want it.’

Mr. Bodery looked between the shafts.

‘You need not be afraid of that fly,’ he said.

‘No—come up, you brute !’

Mr. Bodery turned carelessly to put his bag in the back of the cart.

‘Let him have it,’ he exclaimed in a low voice. ‘Your friend sees you, but he does not know that you have seen him. He is pointing you out to the station-master.’

As he spoke the cart swung round the gate-post of the station yard, nearly throwing him out, and Sidney’s right hand felt for the whip-socket.

‘There,’ he said, ‘we are safe. I think I can manage that fly.’

Mr. Bodery settled himself and drew the dust-cloth over his chubby knees.

‘Now,’ he said, ‘tell me all about Vellacott.’  
Sidney did so.

He gave a full and minute description of

events previous to Christian Vellacott's disappearance, omitting nothing. The relation was somewhat disjointed, somewhat vague in parts, and occasionally incoherent. The narrator repeated himself—hesitated—blurted out some totally irrelevant fact, and finished up with a vague supposition (possessing a solid basis of truth) expressed in doubtful English. It suited Mr. Bodery admirably. In telling all about Vellacott, Sidney unconsciously told all about Mrs. Carew, Molly, Hilda, and himself. When he reached the point in his narration telling how Vellacott had been attracted into the garden, he became extremely vague and his style notably colloquial. Tell the story how he would, he felt that he could not prevent Mr. Bodery from drawing his own inferences. Young ladies are not in the habit of whistling for youthful members of the opposite sex. Few of them

master the labial art, which perhaps accounts for much. Sidney Carew was conscious that his style lacked grace and finish.

Mr. Bodery did draw his own inferences, but the countenance into which Sidney glanced at intervals was one of intense stolidity.

‘ Well, I confess I cannot make it out—at present,’ he said ; ‘ Vellacott has written to us only on business matters. We publish tomorrow a very good article of his purporting to be the dream of an overworked *attaché*. It is very cutting and very incriminating. The Government cannot well avoid taking some notice of it. My only hope is that he is in Paris. There is something brewing over there. Our Paris agent wired for Vellacott this morning. By the way, Mr. Carew, is there a monastery somewhere in this part of the country ? ’

‘ Down that valley,’ replied Sidney, pointing with his whip.

‘ In Vellacott’s article there is mention of a monastery—not too minutely described however. There are also some remarkable suppositions respecting an old foreigner living in seclusion. Could that be the man you mentioned just now—Signor Bruno ? ’

‘ Hardly. Bruno is a harmless old soul,’ replied Sidney, pulling up to turn into the narrow gateway.

There was no time to make further inquiries.

Sidney led the way into the drawing-room. The ladies were there.

‘ My mother, Mr. Bodery—my sister ; my sister Hilda,’ he blurted out awkwardly.

Mrs. Carew shook hands, and the two young ladies bowed. They were all disappointed in Mr. Bodery. He was too calm and

comfortable—also there was a suggestion of cigar smoke in his presence, which jarred.

‘I am sorry,’ said the Londoner, with genial self-possession, ‘to owe the pleasure of this visit to such an unfortunate incident.’

Molly felt that she hated him.

‘Then you have heard nothing of Christian?’ said Mrs. Carew.

‘Nothing,’ replied Mr. Bodery, removing his tight gloves. ‘But it is too soon to think of getting anxious yet. Vellacott is eminently capable of taking care of himself—he is, above all things, a journalist. Things are disturbed in Paris, and it is possible that he has run across there.’

Mrs. Carew smiled somewhat incredulously.

‘It was a singular time to start,’ observed Hilda quietly.

Mr. Bodery turned and looked at her.

‘ Master mind in *this* house,’ he reflected.

‘ Yes,’ he admitted aloud.

He folded his gloves and placed them in the pocket of his coat. The others watched him in silence.

‘ Do you take sugar and cream?’ inquired Hilda sweetly, speaking for the second time.

‘ Please—both. In moderation.’

‘ I say,’ interrupted Sidney at this moment, ‘ the Vicomte d’Audierne is following us in a fly. He will be here in five minutes.’

Mrs. Carew nodded. She had not forgotten this guest.

‘ The Vicomte d’Audierne,’ said Mr. Bodery with considerable interest, turning away from the tea-table, cup in hand. ‘ Is that the man who got out of my train?’

‘ Yes,’ replied Sidney; ‘ do you know him?’

‘ I have heard of him.’

Mr. Bodery turned and took a slice of bread and butter from a plate which Hilda held.

At this moment there was a rumble of carriage wheels.

‘By the way,’ said the editor of the ‘Beacon,’ raising his voice so as to command universal attention, ‘do not tell the Vicomte d’Audierne about Vellacott. Do not let him know that Vellacott has been here. Do not tell him of my connection with the “Beacon.”’

The ladies barely had time to reconsider their first impression of Mr. Bodery when the door was thrown open, and a servant announced M. d’Audierne.

He who entered immediately afterwards—with an almost indecent haste—was of middle height, with a certain intrepid carriage of the head which appeals to such as take pleasure in the strength and endurance of

men. His face, which was clean shaven, was the face of a hawk, with the contracted myope vision characteristic of that bird. It is probable that from the threshold he took in every occupant of the room.

‘Mrs. Carew,’ he said in a pleasant voice, speaking almost faultless English, ‘after all these years. What a pleasure !’

He shook hands, turning at the same time to the others.

‘And Sid,’ he said, ‘and Molly—wicked little Molly. Never mind—your antecedents are safe. I am silent as the grave.’

This was not strictly true. He was as deep, and deeper than the resting-place mentioned, but his method was superior to silence.

‘And Hilda,’ he continued, ‘thoughtful little Hilda, who was always too busy to be naughty Not like Molly, eh ?’

'Heavens! How old it makes one feel,' he exclaimed, turning to Mrs. Carew.

The lady laughed.

'You are not changed, at all events,' she said. 'Allow me to introduce Mr. Bodery—the Vicomte d'Audierne.'

The two men bowed.

'Much pleasure,' said the Frenchman.

Mr. Bodery bowed again in an insular manner, which just escaped awkwardness, and said nothing.

Then Molly offered the new-comer some tea, and the party broke up into groups. But the Vicomte's personality in some subtle manner pervaded the room. Mr. Bodery lapsed into monosyllables and felt ponderous. Monsieur d'Audierne had it in his power to make most men feel ponderous when the spirit moved him in that direction.

As soon as tea was finally disposed of Mrs.

Carew proposed an adjournment to the garden. She was desirous of getting Mr. Bodery to herself.

It fell to Hilda's lot to undertake the Frenchman. They had been great friends once, and she was quite ready to renew the pleasant relationship. She led her guest to the prettiest part of the garden—the old overgrown footpath around the moat.

As soon as they had passed under the nut-trees into the open space at the edge of the water, the Vicomte d'Audierne stopped short and looked round him curiously. At the same time he gave a strange little laugh.

‘*Hein—hein—c'est drôle,*’ he muttered, and the girl remembered that in the old friendship between the brilliant, middle-aged diplomatist and the little child they had always spoken French. She liked to hear him speak his

own language, for in his lips it received full justice: it was the finest tongue spoken on this earth. But she did not feel disposed just then to humour him. She looked at him wonderingly as his deep eyes wandered over the scene.

While they stood there, something—probably a kestrel—disturbed the rooks dwelling in the summits of the still elms across the moat, and they rose simultaneously in the air with long-drawn cries.

‘Ah ! Ah—h !’ said the Vicomte, with a singular smile.

And then Hilda forgot her shyness.

‘What is it?’ she inquired in the language she had always spoken to this man.

He turned and walked beside her, suiting his steps to hers, for some moments before replying.

‘I was not here at all,’ he said at length,

apologetically ; ‘ I was far away from you. It was impolite. I am sorry.’

He intended that she should laugh, and she did so softly. ‘ Where were you ? ’ she inquired, glancing at him beneath her golden lashes.

Again he paused.

‘ There is,’ he said at length, ‘ an old *château* in Morbihan—many miles from a railway—in the heart of a peaceful country. It has a moat like this—there are elms—there are rooks that swing up into the air like that and call—and one does not know why they do it, and what they are calling. Listen—little girl—they are calling something. What is it ? I think I was *there*. It was impolite—I am sorry, Miss Carew.’

She laughed again sympathetically and without mirth ; for she was meant to laugh.

He looked back over his shoulder at times

as if the calling of the rooks jarred upon his nerves.

‘I do not think I like them—’ he said, ‘now.’

He was not apparently disposed to be loquacious as he had been at first. Possibly the rooks had brought about this change. Hilda also had her thoughts. At times she glanced at the water with a certain shrinking in her heart. She had not yet forgotten the moments she had passed at the edge of the moat the night before. They walked right round the moat and down a little pathway through the elm wood without speaking. The rooks had returned to their nests and only called to each other querulously at intervals.

‘Has it ever occurred to you, little girl,’ said the Vicomte d’Audierne suddenly, ‘to doubt the wisdom of the Creator’s arrange-

ments for our comfort, or otherwise, here below?’

‘I suppose not,’ he went on, without waiting for an answer, which she remembered as an old trick of his. ‘You are a woman—it is different for you.’

The girl said nothing. She may have thought differently; one cannot always read a maiden’s thoughts.

They walked on together. Suddenly the Vicomte d’Audierne spoke.

‘Who is this?’ he said.

Hilda followed the direction of his eyes.

‘That,’ she answered, ‘is Signor Bruno. An old Italian exile. A friend of ours.’

Bruno came forward, hat in hand, bowing and smiling in his charming way.

Hilda introduced the two men, speaking in French.

‘I did not know,’ said Signor Bruno

with outspread hands, ‘that you spoke French like a Frenchwoman.’

Hilda laughed.

‘Had it,’ she said with a sudden inspiration, ‘been Italian, I should have told you.’

There was a singular smile visible, for a moment only, in the eyes of the Vicomte d’Audierne, and then he spoke.

‘Mademoiselle,’ he said, ‘learnt most of it from me. We are old friends.’

Signor Bruno bowed. He did not look too well pleased.

‘Ah—but is that so?’ he murmured conversationally.

‘Yes; I hope she learnt nothing else from me,’ replied the Vicomte carelessly.

Hilda turned upon him with a questioning smile.

‘Why?’

‘I do not imagine, little girl,’ replied

d'Audierne, ‘that you could learn very much that is good from me.’

Hilda gave a non-committing little laugh, and led the way through the nut-trees towards the house. The Vicomte d'Audierne followed, and Signor Bruno came last. When they emerged upon the lawn in view of Mrs. Carew and Mr. Bodery, who were walking together, the Vicomte dropped his handkerchief. Signor Bruno attempted to pick it up, and there was a slight delay caused by the interchange of some Gallic politenesses.

Before the two foreigners came up with Hilda, who had walked on, Signor Bruno found time to say :

‘I must see you to-night, without fail. I am in a very difficult position. I have had to resort to strong measures.’

‘Where?’ inquired the Vicomte d'Au-

dierne, with that pleasant nonchalance which is so aggravating to the People.

‘In the village, any time after nine; a yellow cottage near the well.’

‘Good !’

And they joined Hilda Carew.

## CHAPTER XVI

## FOES

IT is only when our feelings are imaginary that we analyse them. When the real thing comes—the thing that only does come to a few of us—we can only feel it, and there is no thought of analysis. Moreover, the action is purely involuntary. We feel strange things—such things as murder—and we cannot help feeling it. We may cringe and shrink; we may toss in our beds when we wake up with such thoughts living, moving, having their being in our brains—but we cannot toss them off. The very attempt to do so is a realisation, and from consciousness

we spring to knowledge. We know that in our hearts we are thieves, murderers, slanderers ; we know that if we read of such thoughts in a novel we should hold the thinker in all horror ; but we are distinctly conscious all the time that these thoughts are our own. This is just the difference existing between artificial feelings and real : the one bears analysis, the other cannot.

Hilda Carew could not have defined her feelings on the evening of the arrival of Mr. Bodery and the Vicomte d'Audierne. She was conscious of the little facts of everyday existence. She dressed for dinner with singular care ; during that repast she talked and laughed much as usual, but all the while she felt like anyone in all the world but Hilda Carew. At certain moments she wondered with a throb of apprehension whether the difference which was so glaringly patent to

herself could possibly be hidden from others. She caught strange inflections in her own voice which she knew had never been there before—her own laughter was a new thing to her. And yet she went on through dinner and until bedtime, acting this strange part without break, without fault—a part which had never been rehearsed and never learnt: a part which was utterly artificial and yet totally without art, for it came naturally.

And through it all she feared the Vicomte d'Audierne. Mr. Bodery counted for nothing. He made a very good dinner, was genial and even witty in a manner befitting his years and station. Mrs. Carew was fully engaged with her guests, and Molly was on lively terms with the Vicomte; while Sidney, old Sidney—no one counted him. It was only the Vicomte who paused at intervals during his frugal meal, and looked

across the table towards the young girl with those deep impenetrable eyes—shadowless, gleamless, like velvet.

When bedtime at length arrived, she was quite glad to get away from that kind, unobtrusive scrutiny of which she alone was aware. She went to her room, and sitting wearily on the bed she realised for the first time in her life the incapacity to think. It is a realisation which usually comes but once or twice in a lifetime, and we are therefore unable to get accustomed to it. She was conscious of intense pressure within her brain, of a hopeless weight upon her heart, but she could define neither. She rose at length, and mechanically went to bed like one in a trance. In the same way she fell asleep.

In the meantime Mr. Bodery, Sidney Carew, and the Vicomte d'Audierne were

smoking in the little room at the side of the porch. A single lamp with a red shade hung from the ceiling in the centre of this room, hardly giving enough light to read by. There were half-a-dozen deep arm-chairs, a divan, and two or three small tables—beyond that nothing. Sidney's father had furnished it thus, with a knowledge and appreciation of Oriental ways. It was not a study, nor a library, nor a den; but merely a smoking-room. Mr. Bodery had lighted an excellent cigar, and through the thin smoke he glanced persistently at the Vicomte d'Audierne. The Vicomte did not return this attention; he glanced at the clock instead. He was thinking of Signor Bruno, but he was too polite and too diplomatic to give way to restlessness.

At last Mr. Bodery opened fire from, as it were, a masked battery; for he knew that

the Frenchman was ignorant of his connection with one of the leading political papers of the day. It was a duel between sheer skill and confident foreknowledge. When Mr. Bodery spoke, Sidney Carew leant back in his chair and puffed vigorously at his briar-pipe.

‘Things,’ said the Englishman, ‘seem to be very unsettled in France just now.’

The Vicomte was engaged in rolling a cigarette, and he finished the delicate operation before looking up with a grave smile.

‘Yes,’ he said. ‘In Paris. But Paris is not France. That fact is hardly realised in England, I think.’

‘What,’ inquired Mr. Bodery, with that conversational heaviness of touch which is essentially British, ‘is the meaning of this disturbance?’

Sidney Carew was enveloped in a perfect cloud of smoke.

For a moment—and a moment only—the Vicomte's profound gaze rested on the Englishman's face. Mr. Bodery was evidently absorbed in the enjoyment of his cigar. The smile that lay on his genial face like a mask was the smile of a consciousness that he was making himself intensely pleasant, and adapting his conversation to his company in a quite phenomenal way.

‘Ah !’ replied the Frenchman with a neat little shrug of bewilderment. ‘Who can tell? Probably there is no meaning in it. There is so often no meaning in the action of a Parisian mob.’

‘Many things without meaning are not without result.’

Again the Vicomte looked at Mr. Bodery, and again he was baffled.

‘ You only asked me the meaning,’ he said lightly. ‘ I am glad you did not inquire after the result; because there I should indeed have been at fault. I always argue to myself that it is useless to trouble one’s brain about results. I leave such matters to the good God. He will probably do just as well without my assistance.’

‘ You are a philosopher,’ said Mr. Bodery with a pleasant and friendly laugh.

‘ Thank heaven—yes! Look at my position. Fancy carrying in France to-day a name that is to be found in the most abridged history. One needs to be a philosopher, Mr. Bodery.’

‘ But,’ suggested the Englishman, ‘ there may be changes. It may all come right.’

The Vicomte sipped his whisky and water with vicious emphasis.

‘ If it began at once,’ he said, ‘ it would

never be right in my time. Not as it used to be. And in the meantime we are in the present—in the present France is governed by newspaper men.'

Sidney drew in his feet and coughed. Some of his smoke had gone astray.

Mr. Bodery looked sympathetic.

'Yes,' he said calmly, 'that really seems to be the case.'

'And newspaper men,' pursued the Vicomte, 'what are they? Men of no education, no position, no sense of honour. The great aim of politicians in France to-day is the aggrandisement of themselves.'

Mr. Bodery yawned.

'Ah!' he said, with a glance towards Sidney.

Perhaps the Frenchman saw the glance, perhaps he was deceived by the yawn. At all events, he rose and expressed a desire to

retire to his room. He was tired, he said, having been travelling all the previous night.

Mr. Bodery had not yet finished his cigar, so he rose and shook hands without displaying any intention of following the Vicomte's example.

Sidney lighted a candle, one of many standing on a side table, and led the way upstairs. They walked through the long dimly-lighted corridors in silence, and it was only when they had arrived in the room set apart for the Vicomte d'Audierne that this gentleman spoke.

‘By the way,’ he said, ‘who is this person—this Mr. Bodery? He was not a friend of your father’s.’

Sidney was lighting the tall candles that stood upon the dressing-table, and the combined illumination showed with remarkable distinctness the reflection of his face in the

mirror. From whence he stood the Frenchman could see this reflection.

‘He is the friend of a great friend of mine ; that is how we know him,’ replied Sidney, prizing up the wick of a candle. He was still rising to the occasion—this dull young Briton. Then he turned. ‘Christian Vellacott,’ he said ; ‘you knew his father ?’

‘Ah, yes ; I knew his father.’

Sidney was moving to the door without any hurry, and also without any intention of being deterred.

‘His father,’ continued the Vicomte, winding his watch meditatively, ‘was brilliant. Has the son inherited any brain ?’

‘I think so. Good night.’

‘Good night.’

When the door was closed the Vicomte looked at his watch. It was almost midnight.

‘The Reverend Father Talma will have to wait till to-morrow morning,’ he said to himself. ‘I cannot go to him to-night. It would be too theatrical. That old gentleman is getting too old for his work.’

In the meantime, Sidney returned to the little smoking-room at the side of the porch. There he found Mr. Bodery smoking with his usual composure. The younger man forbore asking any questions. He poured out for himself some whisky, and opened a bottle of soda-water with deliberate care and noiselessness.

‘That man,’ said Mr. Bodery at length, ‘knows nothing about Vellacott.’

‘You think so?’

‘I am convinced of it. By the way, who is the old gentleman who came to tea this afternoon?’

‘Signor Bruno, do you mean?’

‘I suppose so—that super-innocent old man with the white hair who wears window-glass spectacles.’

‘Are they window-glass?’ asked Sidney, with a little laugh.

‘They struck me as window-glass—quite flat. Who is he—beyond his name, I mean?’

‘He is an Italian refugee—lives in the village.’

Mr. Bodery had taken his silver pencil from his waistcoat pocket, and was rolling it backwards and forwards on the table. This was indicative of the fact that the editor of the ‘Beacon’ was thinking deeply.

‘Ah! And how long has he been here?’

‘Only a few weeks.’

Mr. Bodery looked up sharply.

‘Is *that* all?’ he inquired with an eager little laugh.

‘Yes.’

‘Then, my dear sir, Vellacott is right. That old man is at the bottom of it. This Vicomte d’Audierne, what do you know of him?’

‘Personally?’

‘Yes.’

‘He is an old friend of my father’s. In fact, he is a friend of the family. He calls the girls by their Christian names, as you have heard to-night.’

‘Yes; I noticed that. And he came here to-day merely on a friendly visit?’

‘That is all. Why do you ask?’ inquired Sidney, who was getting rather puzzled.

‘I know nothing of him personally—except what I have learnt to-day. For my own part, I like him,’ answered Mr. Bodery. ‘He is keen and clever. Moreover, he is a thorough gentleman. But, politically speaking, he is one of the most dangerous men in

France. He is a Jesuit, an active Royalist, and a staunch worker for the Church party. I don't know much about French politics—that is Vellacott's department. But I know that if he were here, and knew of the Vicomte's presence in England, he would be very much on the alert.'

'Then,' asked Sidney, 'do you connect the presence of the Vicomte here with the absence of Vellacott?'

'There can be little question about it, directly or indirectly. Indirectly, I should think, unless the Vicomte d'Audierne is a scoundrel.'

Sidney thought deeply.

'He may be,' he admitted.

'I do not,' pursued Mr. Bodery with a certain easy deliberation, 'think that the Vicomte is aware of Vellacott's existence. That is my opinion.'

‘He asked who you were—if you were a friend of my father’s.’

‘And you said——’

‘No! I said that you were a friend of a friend, and mentioned Vellacott’s name. He knew his father very well.’

‘Were you?’—asked Mr. Bodery, throwing away the end of his cigar and rising from his deep chair—‘Were you looking at the Vicomte when you answered the question?’

‘Yes.’

‘And there was no sign of discomfort—no flicker of the eyelids, for instance?’

‘No; nothing.’

Mr. Bodery nodded his head in a business-like way, indicative of the fact that he was engaged in assimilating a good deal of useful information.

‘There is nothing to be done to-night,’ he said presently, as he made a movement

towards the door, ‘but to go to bed. To-morrow the “Beacon” will be published, and the result will probably be rather startling. We shall hear something before to-morrow afternoon.’

Sidney lighted Mr. Bodery’s candle, and shook hands.

‘By the way,’ said the editor, turning back and speaking more lightly, ‘if anyone should inquire—your mother or one of your sisters—you can say that I am not in the least anxious about Vellacott. Good-night.’

## CHAPTER XVII

## A RETREAT

It was quite early the next morning when the Vicomte d'Audierne left his room. As he walked along the still corridor and down the stairs it was noticeable that he made absolutely no sound, without, however, indulging in any of those contortions which are peculiar to late arrivals in church. It would seem that Nature had for purposes of her own made his footfall noiseless—if, by the way, Nature can be credited with any purpose whatever in her allotment of human gifts and failings.

In the hall he found a stout cook armed for assault upon the front-door step.

‘Good morning,’ he said. ‘Can you tell me the breakfast-hour? I forgot to inquire last night.’

‘Nine o’clock, sir,’ replied the servant, rather taken aback at the thought of having this visitor dependent upon her for entertainment during the next hour and a half.

‘Ah—and it is not yet eight. Never mind. I will go into the garden. I am fond of fruit before breakfast.’

He took his hat and lounged away towards the kitchen-garden which lay near the moat.

‘And now,’ he said to himself, looking round him in a searching way, ‘where is this pestilential village?’

The way was not hard to find, and as the

church clock struck eight the Vicomte d'Audierne opened the little green gate of the cottage where Signor Bruno was lodging.

The old gentleman must have been watching for him; for he opened the door before the Vicomte reached it.

He turned and led the way into a little room on the right hand of the narrow passage. A little room intensely typical: china dogs, knitted antimacassars of a brilliant tendency, and horse-hair covered furniture. There was even the usual stuffy odour as if the windows, half-hidden behind muslin curtains and scarlet geraniums, were never opened from one year's end to another.

Signor Bruno closed the door before speaking. Then he turned upon his companion with something very like fury glittering in his eyes.

‘Why did you not come last night?’ he

asked. ‘I am left alone to contend against one difficulty on the top of another. Read that !’

He drew from his pocket a thin and somewhat crumpled sheet of paper, upon which there were two columns of printed matter.

‘That,’ he said, ‘cost us two thousand francs.’

The Vicomte d’Audierne read the printed matter carefully from beginning to end. He had approached the window because the light was bad, and when he finished he looked up for a few minutes, out of the little casement, upon the quiet village scene.

‘The “Beacon,”’ he said, turning round, ‘what is that?’

‘A leading weekly newspaper.’

‘Published——?’

‘To-day,’ snapped Signor Bruno.

The Vicomte d'Audierne made a little grimace.

‘Who wrote this?’ he inquired.

‘Christian Vellacott, son of *the* Vellacott, whom you knew in the old days.’

‘Ah! ’

There was something in the Vicomte’s expressive voice that made Signor Bruno look at him sharply with some apprehension.

‘Why do you say that?’

The Vicomte countered with another question.

‘Who is this Mr. Bodery?’

He gave a little jerk with his head in the direction of the house he had just left.

‘I do not know.’

‘I was told last night that he was a friend of this Christian Vellacott—a protector.’

The two Frenchmen looked at each other in silence. Signor Bruno was evidently alarmed—his lips were white and unsteady. There was a smile upon the bird-like face of the younger man, and behind his spectacles his eyes glittered with an excitement in which there was obviously no fear.

‘Do you know,’ he asked in a disagreeably soft manner, ‘where Christian Vellacott is?’

Across the benevolent old face of Signor Bruno there came a very evil smile.

‘You will do better not to ask me that question,’ he replied, ‘unless you mean to run for it—as I do.’

The Vicomte d’Audierne looked at his companion in a curious way.

‘You had,’ he said, ‘at one time no rival as a man of action——’

Signor Bruno shrugged his shoulders.

‘I am a man of action still.’

The Vicomte folded the proof-sheet carefully, handed it back to his companion, and said:

‘Then I understand that—there will be no more of these very clever articles?’

Bruno nodded his head

‘I ask no questions,’ continued the other.  
‘It is better so. I shall stay where I am for a few days, unless it grows *too* hot—unless I think it expedient to vanish.’

‘You have courage?’

‘No; I have impertinence—that is all. There will be a storm—a newspaper storm. The embassies will be busy; in the English Parliament some pompous fool will ask a question, and be snubbed for his pains. In the *Chambre* the newspapermen will rant and challenge each other in the corridors; and it will blow over. In the meantime we have

got what we want, and we can hide it till we have need of it. Your Reverence and I have met difficulties together before this one.'

But Signor Bruno was not inclined to fall in with these optimistic views.

'I am not so sure,' he said, 'that we *have* got what we want. There has been no acknowledgment of receipt of the last parcel—in the usual way—the English "Standard."

'What was the last parcel?'

'Fifty thousand cartridges.'

'But they were sent?'

'Yes; they were despatched in the usual way; but, as I say, they have not been acknowledged. There may have been some difficulty on the other side. Our police are not so easy-going as these coastguard gentlemen.'

‘Well,’ said the aristocrat, with that semi-bantering lightness of manner which sometimes aggravated, and always puzzled, his colleagues. ‘We will not give ourselves trouble over that: the matter is out of our hands. Let us rather think of ourselves. Have you money?’

‘Yes—I have sufficient.’

‘It is now eight o’clock—this newspaper—this precious “Beacon” is now casting its light into some dark intellects in London. It will take those intellects two hours to assimilate the information, and one more hour to proceed to action. You have, therefore, three hours in which to make yourself scarce.’

‘I have arranged that,’ replied the old man calmly. ‘There is a small French potato-ship lying at Exmouth. In two hours I shall be one of her crew.’

‘ That is well. And the others ? ’

‘ The others left yesterday afternoon. They cross by this morning’s boat from Southampton to Cherbourg. You see how much I have had to do.’

‘ I see also, my friend, how well you have done it.’

‘ And now,’ said Signor Bruno, ignoring the compliment, ‘ I must go. We will walk away by the back garden across the fields. You must remember that you may have been seen coming here.’

‘ I have thought of that. One old man saw me, but he did not look at me twice. He will not know me again. And your landlady —where is she ? ’

‘ I have sent her out on a fool’s errand.’

As they spoke they left the little cottage by the back door, as Signor Bruno had proposed, through the little garden, and across

some low-lying fields. Presently they parted, Signor Bruno turning to the left, while the Vicomte d'Audierne kept to the right.

‘We shall meet, I suppose,’ were the last words of the younger man, ‘in the Rue St. Gingolphe?’

‘Yes—in the Rue St. Gingolphe.’

For so old a man the pace at which Signor Bruno breasted the hill that lay before him was somewhat remarkable. The Vicomte d'Audierne, on the other hand, was evidently blessed with a greater leisure. He looked at his watch and strolled on through the dew-laden meadows, wrapt in thought as in a cloak that hid the sweet freshness of the flowery hedgerows, that muffled the broken song of the busy birds, that killed the scent of ripening hay. Thus these two singular men parted—and it happened that they were never to meet again. These little things *do*

happen. We meet with gravity; we part with a smile; perhaps we make an appointment; possibly we speak of the pleasure that the meeting seems to promise: and the next meeting is put off; it belongs to the great postponement.

Often we part with an indifferent nod, as these two men parted amidst the sylvan peace of English meadow on that summer morning. They belonged to two different stations in life almost as far apart as two social stations could be, even in a republic. They were not, in any sense of the word, friends; they were merely partners, intensely awake, as partners usually are, to each other's shortcomings.

The Vicomte d'Audierne probably thought no more of Signor Bruno from the moment that he raised his hat and turned. A few moments later his thoughts were evidently far away.

'The son of Vellacott,' he muttered, as he took a cigarette from a neat silver case.  
'How strange! And yet I am sorry. He might have done something in the world. That article was clever—very clever—curse it! He cannot yet be thirty. But one would expect something from the son of a man like Vellacott.'

It was not yet nine o'clock when the Vicomte entered the dining-room by the open window. Only Hilda was there, and she was busy with the old leather post-bag. Among the letters there were several newspapers, and the Vicomte d'Audierne's expression underwent a slight change on perceiving them. His thin mobile lips were closely pressed, and his chin—a very short one—was thrust forward. Behind the gentle spectacles his eyes assumed for a moment that singular blinking look which cannot be described in English,

for it seemed to change their colour. In his country it would have been called *glauque*.

‘Ah, Hilda !’ he said, approaching slowly, ‘do I see newspapers ? I love a newspaper !’

She handed him the ‘Times’ enveloped in a yellow wrapper, upon which was printed her brother’s name and address.

‘Ah,’ he said lightly, ‘the “Times”— estimable, but just a trifle opaque. Is that all ?’

His eyes were fixed upon two packets she held in her hand.

‘These are Mr. Bodery’s,’ she replied, looking at him with some concentration.

‘And what newspaper does Mr. Bodery read ?’ asked the Frenchman, holding out his hand.

She hesitated for a moment. His position with regard to her was singular, his ascendancy over her had never been tried. It

was an unknown quantity ; but the Vicomte d'Audierne knew his own power.

‘ Let me look, little girl,’ he said quietly in French.

She handed him the newspapers, still watching his face.

‘ The “ Beacon,”’ he muttered, reading aloud from the ornamented wrapper, ‘ a weekly journal.’

He threw the papers down and returned to the ‘ Times,’ which he unfolded.

‘ Tell me, Hilda,’ he said, ‘ is Mr. Bodery connected with this weekly journal, the “ Beacon ” ? ’

Her back was turned towards him. She was hanging up the key of the post-bag on a nail beside the fireplace.

‘ Yes,’ she replied, without looking round.

‘ Is he the editor ? ’

‘ Yes.’

The Vicomte d'Audierne turned the 'Times' carelessly.

'Ah!' he muttered, 'the phylloxera has appeared again.'

For some time he appeared to be absorbed in this piece of news, then he spoke again.

'I knew something of a man who writes for that newspaper—the "Beacon." I knew his father very well.'

'Yes.'

The Vicomte glanced at her.

'Christian Vellacott,' he said.

'We know him also,' she answered, moving towards the bell. He made a step forward as if about to offer to ring the bell for her, but she was too quick.

When the butler entered the room, Hilda reminded him of some small omission in setting out the breakfast-table. The item required was in the room, and the man set

it upon the table with some decision and a slightly aggrieved cast of countenance.

The Vicomte d'Audierne raised his eyes, and then he looked very grave. He was a singular man in many ways, but those who worked with him were aware of one peculiarity which by its prominence cast others into the shade. He possessed a very useful gift rarely given to men—the gift of intuition. It was dangerous to *think* when the eyes of the Vicomte d'Audierne were upon one's face. He had a knack of knowing one's thoughts before they were even formulated.

He looked grave—almost distressed—on this occasion, because he knew something of which Hilda herself was ignorant. He knew that she was engaged to be married to one man while she loved another.

## CHAPTER XVIII

## AN EMPTY NEST

In the middle of breakfast a card was handed to Sidney Carew. He glanced at it, nodded his head as a signal to the servant that he need not wait, and slipped the card into his pocket. Mr. Bodery and the Vicomte d'Audierne were watching him.

Presently he rose from the table and left the room. Mrs. Carew became suddenly lively, and the meal went on unconcernedly. It was not long before Sidney came back.

'Do you want,' he said to his mother, 'some tickets for a concert at Brayport on the 4th of next month ?'

‘What sort of a concert?’

Sidney consulted the tickets.

‘In aid,’ he read, ‘of an orphanage—the Police Orphanage.’

‘We always take six tickets,’ put in Miss Molly, and her mother began to seek her pocket.

‘Mr. Bodery,’ said Sidney, at this moment, ‘you have nothing to eat. Let me cut you some ham.’

He moved towards the sideboard, but Mr. Bodery rose from his seat.

‘I prefer to carve it myself,’ he replied, proceeding to do so.

Sidney held the plate. They were quite close together, and Hilda was talking persistently and gaily to the Vicomte d’Audierne.

‘The London police are here already,’ whispered Sidney; ‘shall I say anything about Vellacott?’

‘No,’ replied Mr. Bodery, after a moment’s reflection.

‘I am going to ride over to Porton Abbey with them now.’

‘Right,’ replied the editor, returning to the table with his plate.

Sidney left the room again, and the Vicomte d’Audierne detected the quick anxious glance directed by Hilda at his retreating form. A few minutes later young Carew rode away from the house in company with two men, while a fourth horseman followed closely.

He who rode on Sidney’s left hand was a tall, grizzled man, with the bearing of a soldier, while his second companion was fair and gentle in manner. The soldier was Captain Pharland, District Inspector of Police ; the civilian was the keenest detective in London.

‘Of course,’ said this man, who sat his hired horse with perfect confidence. ‘Of course we are too late, I know that.’

He spoke softly and somewhat slowly; his manner was essentially that of a man accustomed to the entire attention of his hearers.

‘The old Italian,’ he continued, ‘who went under the name of Signor Bruno, disappeared this morning. It is just possible that he will succeed in getting out of the country. It all depends upon who he is.’

‘Who do you suppose he is?’ asked Captain Pharland. He was an upright old British soldier, and felt ill at ease in the society of his celebrated *confrère*.

‘I don’t know,’ was the frank reply; ‘you see this is not a criminal affair, it is entirely political; it is hardly in my line of country.’

They rode on in silence for a space of time, during which Captain Pharland lighted a cigar and offered one to his companions. Sidney accepted, but the gentleman from London refused quietly, and without explanation. It was he who spoke first.

‘Mr. Carew,’ he said, ‘can you tell me when this monastery was first instituted at Porton Abbey?’

‘Last autumn.’

The thin flaxen eyebrows went up very high, until they were lost to sight beneath the hat brim.

‘Did they—ah—deal with the local tradesmen?’

‘No,’ replied Sidney, ‘I think not. They received all their stores by train from London.’

‘And you have never seen any of the monks?’

‘No, never.’

The fair-haired gentleman gave a little upward jerk of the head and smiled quietly for his own satisfaction.

He did not speak again until the cavalcade reached Porton Abbey. The old place looked very peaceful in the morning light, standing grimly in the midst of that soft lush grass which only grows over old habitations.

One side of the long low building was in good repair, while the other half had been allowed to crumble away. The narrow Norman windows had been framed with unpainted wood and cheap glass. The broad doorway had been partly filled in with unseasoned deal, and an inexpensive door had been fitted up.

The bell-knob was of brass, new and glaring in the morning sun. The gentleman

from London, having alighted, took gently hold of this and rang. A faint tinkle rewarded him. It was the peculiar sound of a bell ringing in an empty house. After a moment's pause he wrenched the bell nearly out of its socket, and a long peal was the result. At last this ceased, and there was no sound in the house. The fair man looked back over his shoulder at Captain Pharland.

‘Gone!’ he said tersely.

Then he took from his breast pocket a little bar in the shape of a lever. He introduced the bent end of this between the door and the post, just above the keyhole, and gave a sharp jerk. There was a short crack like that made by the snapping of cast iron, and the door flew open.

Without a moment's hesitation the man

went in, followed closely by Sidney and Captain Pharland.

The birds had flown. As mysteriously as they had come, the devotees had vanished. Bare walls met the eyes of the searchers. Porton Abbey stood empty again after its brief return to life and warmth, and indeed it scarcely looked habitable. The few personal effects of the simple monks had been removed; the walls and stone floors were rigidly clean; the small chapel showed signs of recent repair. There was an altar-cloth, a crucifix, and two brass candlesticks.

The gentleman from London noted these items with a cynical smile. He had instinctively removed his hat; it is just possible that there was another side to this man's life—a side wherein he dealt with men who were not openly villains. He may have been a churchwarden at home.

‘Clever beggars!’ he ejaculated, ‘they were ready for every emergency.’

Captain Pharland pointed to the altar with his heavy riding-whip.

‘Then,’ he said, ‘you think this all humbug?’

‘I do. They were no more monks than we are.’

The search did not last much longer. Only a few rooms had been inhabited, and there was absolutely nothing left—no shred of evidence, no clue whatever.

‘Yes,’ said the fair-haired man, when they had finished their inspection, ‘these were exceptional men; they knew their business.’

As they left the house he paused, and closed the door again, remaining inside.

‘You see,’ he said, ‘there is not even a bolt on the door. They knew better than to

depend on bolts and bars. They knew a trick worth two of that.'

At the gate they met a small inoffensive man, with a brown beard and a walking-stick. There was nothing else to say about him ; without the beard and the walking-stick there would have been nothing left to know him by.

'That is my assistant,' announced the London detective quietly. 'He has been down to the cliff.'

The two men stepped aside together, and consulted in an undertone for some time. Then the last speaker returned to Captain Pharland and Sidney, who were standing together.

'That newspaper,' he said, 'the "Beacon,"' is word for word right. My assistant has been to the spot. The arms and ammunition have undoubtedly been shipped from

this place. The cases of cartridges mentioned by the man who wrote the article as having been seen, in a dream, half-way down the cliff, are actually there ; my assistant has seen them.'

Captain Pharland scratched his honest cavalry head. He was beginning to regret that he had accepted the post of district inspector of the police. Sidney Carew puffed at his pipe in silence.

'Of course,' said the detective, 'the newspaper man got all this information through the treachery of one of the party. I should like to get hold of that traitor. He would be a useful man to know.'

In this the astute gentleman from London betrayed his extremely limited knowledge of the Society of Jesus. There are no traitors in that vast corporation.

Sidney and Captain Pharland rode home

together, leaving the two detectives to find their way to Brayport Station.

They rode in silence, for the Captain was puzzled, and his companion was intensely anxious.

Sidney Carew was beginning to realise that the events of the last three days had a graver import than they at first promised to conceal. The now celebrated article in the ‘Beacon’ opened his eyes, and he knew that the writer of it must have paid very dearly for his daring. It seemed extremely probable that the head and hands which had conceived and carried out this singular feat were both still for ever. Vellacott’s own written tribute to the vast powers of the Jesuits, and their immovable habit of forcing a way through all obstacles to the end in view, was scarcely reassuring to his friends.

Sidney knew and recognised the usual

fertility of resource possessed by his friend ; but against him were pitted men of greater gifts, of less scruple, and of infinitely superior training in the crooked ways of humanity. That he should have been so long without vouchsafing word or sign was almost proof positive that his absence was involuntary ; and men capable of placing fire-arms into the hands of a maddened mob were not likely to hesitate in sacrificing a single life that chanced to stand in their path.

As the young fellow rode along, immersed in meditation, he heard the sound of carriage-wheels, and, looking up, recognised his own grey horse and dog-cart. Mr. Bodery was driving, and driving hard. On seeing Sidney he pulled up, somewhat recklessly, in a manner which suggested that he had not always been a stout middle-aged Londoner.

‘ Been telegraphed for,’ he shouted, ‘ by

head instead of interlocked branches. He could just discern that Hilda was not at her usual seat upon the rustic bench farther towards the end of the moat, and he stopped short, with a sudden misgiving, at the spot where the path met, at right angles, the broader stone walk extending the full length of the water.

He was on the point of whistling softly the familiar refrain, when there was a rustle in the bushes behind him. A rush, a sudden shock, and a pair of muscular hands were closed round his throat dragging him backwards. But Christian stood like a rock. Quick as thought he seized the two wrists, which were small and flat, and wrenched them apart. Then, stepping back with one foot in order to obtain surer leverage, he lifted his assailant from the ground, swung him round, and literally let him fly into

the moat—with a devout hope that it might be Signor Bruno. The man hurtled through the darkness, without a cry or sound, and fell face foremost into the water, five yards from the edge, throwing into the air a shower of spray.

Christian Vellacott was one of those men whose litheness is greater than their actual muscular force; but a lithe man possesses greater powers of endurance than a powerful fellow whose muscles are more highly developed. The exertion of lifting his assailant and swinging him away into the darkness was great, although the man's weight was nothing very formidable, and Christian staggered back a few paces without, however, actually losing his balance. At this moment two men sprang upon him from behind and dragged him to the ground. He felt at once that this was a very different

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matter. Either of these two could have overpowered him singly. Their thick arms encompassed him like the coils of a snake, and there was about their heavy woollen clothing a faint odour of salt water. He knew that they were sailors. Recognising that it was of no avail, he still fought on, as Englishmen do. One of the men had wound a large woollen scarf round his mouth, the other was slowly but very surely succeeding in pinioning his arms. Then a third assailant came, and Christian knew by the wet hand (for he used one arm only) that it was the smallest of the three, who had suffered for his temerity.

‘Quick, quick!’ this man whispered in French. With his uninjured hand he twisted the scarf tighter and tighter until Christian gasped for breath.

Still the Englishman struggled and writhed

upon the ground, while the hard breathing of the two sailors testified that it was no mean resistance. Suddenly the one-armed man loosened the scarf, but before Christian could recover his breath a handkerchief was pressed over his lips, and a sweet pungent odour filled his nostrils.

‘Three to one,’ he gasped, and quite suddenly his head fell forward, while his clutch relaxed.

‘He is a brave man,’ said the dripping leader of the attack, as he stood upright and touched his damaged shoulder gently and tentatively. ‘Now quick to the carriage with him. You have not managed this well, my friends, not at all well.’

The speaker raised his cold hand to his forehead, which was wet, less perhaps from past exertion than from the agony he was enduring.

‘But, monsieur,’ grumbled one of the sailors in humble self-defence, ‘he is made of steel!’

. . . . .  
The pale light of a grey dawn was stealing slowly up into the riven sky, lighting up the clouds which were flying eastward on the shoulder of a boisterous wind. The heavy grey sea, heaving, surging, and hissing, threw itself upwards into broken spray, which flew to leeward at a sharp angle, blown from the summit of the wave like froth from an overfilled tankard. After a night of squally restlessness, accompanied by a driving rain that tasted brackish, things had settled down with the dawn into a steady, roaring gale of wind. In the growing light sea-gulls rose triumphantly with smooth breasts bravely facing the wind.

In the midst of this a dripping vessel laboured sorely. The green water rushed from side to side over her slippery, filthy deck as she rolled, and carried with it a tangled mass of ropes, a wooden bucket, a capstan-bar, and—ominous sign—a soaking, limp fur cap. The huge boom, reaching nearly the whole length of the little vessel, swung wildly from side to side as the yawl dipped her bulwarks to the receding wave. It was certain death for a man to attempt to stand upright upon the sopping deck, for the huge spar swung shoulder high. The steersman, crouching low by his strong tiller, was doing his best to avoid a clean sweep, but only a small jib and the mizzen were standing with straining clews and gleaming seams. Crouching beneath the weather bulwarks, with their feet wedged against the low combing of the hatch, three men were

vainly endeavouring to secure the boom, and to disentangle the clogged ropes. Two were huge fellows with tawny washed-out beards innocent of brush or comb, their faces were half hidden by rough sou'-westers, and they were enveloped from head to foot in oilskins from which the water ran in little rills. The third was Christian Vellacott, who looked very wet indeed. The water was dripping from his cuffs and running down his face. His black dress-clothes were clinging to him with a soppy hindrance, while the feet firmly planted against the combing of the hatch were encased in immaculate patent-leather shoes, and the salt water ran off silk socks. It would have been very funny if it were not that fortune invariably mingles her strokes of humour most heedlessly with sadder things. Christian Vellacott was apparently unconscious of the humour of the situation. He

was working patiently and steadily, as men must needs work when fighting Nature, and his half-forgotten sea-craft was already coming back. Beneath his steady hands something akin to order was slowly being achieved ; he was coiling and disentangling the treacherous rope, of which the breaking had cast the boom adrift, laying low a good seaman.

Farther forward upon the hatch lay the limp body of a very big man. His matted head was bare, and the dead brown face, turned upward to its Maker, jerked from side to side as the vessel heaved. The stalwart legs were encased in greasy sea-boots, deeply wrinkled, and the coils of a huge scarf of faded purple lay upon his broad breast, where they had been dragged down by a hasty hand in order to see more clearly the still features.

At the dead man's side knelt upon the deck a small spare figure clad in black and

wearing his left arm in a sling. With his right hand he held a crucifix to the blue lips that would never breathe a prayer to the Virgin again. The small mouth and refined features of the praying man were strangely out of keeping with his tempestuous surroundings. Unmindful, however, of wind and waves alike, he knelt and prayed audibly. Each lurch of the vessel threw him forward, so that, in order to save himself from falling, he was obliged to press heavily upon the dead man's throat and breast; but this he heeded not. His girlish blue eyes were half closed in an ecstasy of religious fervour, and the pale narrow face wore a light that was not reflected from sea or sky. This was the man who had unhesitatingly attacked Vellacott, had dared to pit his small strength, more of nerve than of muscle, against the young Englishman's hardened sinews. Violence in

itself was most abhorrent to him ; it had no part in his nature ; and consequently, by the strange tenets of Ignatius Loyola's disciples, he was condemned to a course of it. Any objectionable duty, such as this removal of Vellacott, was immediately assigned to him in the futile endeavour of subjecting the soul to the brain. A true Jesuit must have no nature of his own and no individuality. He is simply a machine, with likes and dislikes, conscience and soul subject to the will of his superior, whose mind is also under the same arbitrary control ; and so on to the top. If at the head there were God, it would be well ; but man is there, and consequently the whole society is a gigantic mistake. To be a sincere member of it, a man must be a half-witted fool, a religious fanatic, or a rogue for whom no duplicity is too scurrilous, even though it amount to blasphemy.

René Drucquer, the man kneeling on the slimy deck, was as nearly a religious fanatic as his soft sweet nature would allow. With greater bodily strength and attendant greater passions, he would have been a simple monomaniac. In him the passion for self-devotion was singularly strong, and contact with men had cooled it down into an unusually deep sense of duty.

Personally courageous, his bravery was of a high order, if the spirit of self-devotion called it into existence. In this his courage was more akin to that of women than of men. If duty drove him he would go where the devil drags most people, and René Drucquer was not by any means the first man or woman whose life has been wrecked, wasted, and utterly misled by a blind devotion to duty.

When throwing himself upon Christian Vellacott, no thought of possible danger to

his own person had restrained or caused him a moment's hesitation. His blind faith in the righteousness of his cause was, however, on the wane. This disciple of St. Ignatius might have lived a true and manly life three hundred years earlier when his master trod the earth, but the march of intellect had trodden down the ‘Constitutions’ years before René Drucquer came to study them. An ignoramus and a zealot who lived nearly four centuries ago can be no guide or help to men of the present day, and this young priest was overshadowed by the saddest doubt that comes to men on earth—the doubt of his own Creed.

While Christian Vellacott was assisting the sailors he glanced occasionally towards the kneeling priest, and on the narrow intelligent face he read a truth that never was forgotten. He saw that Réne Drucquer was

unconscious of his surroundings—unmindful of the fact that he was on board a disabled vessel at the mercy of the wild wind. His whole being was absorbed in prayer: this priest remembered only that the soul of the great, rough, disfigured man was winging its serene way to the land where no clouds are. Christian was not an impressionable man—journalism had killed all that—nor, it is to be feared, did he devote much thought to religion; but he recognised goodness when he met it. The young journalist's interest was aroused, and in that trifling incident lay the salvation of the priest. From that small beginning came the gleam of light that was to illuminate gloriously the darkness of a mistaken life.

Chance had capriciously ruled that the hand that had dislocated the Abbé's arm should set it again, and the dead sailor lying

on the sticky, tarred hatch-cover had helped. The ‘patron’ of the boat, for he it was whose head had been smashed by the spar, had held the priest’s trembling, swollen shoulder while Christian’s steady hands gave the painful jerk required to slip the joint back into its socket. The great coarse lips which had trembled a little, with a true Frenchman’s sympathy for suffering, were now blue and drawn ; the stout tender hands were nerveless.

The priest prayed on, while the men worked near at hand seeking to restore order, and to repair the damages made by sea and wind. They had got over their sullen, native shyness on finding that Christian could speak French like the Abbé and was almost as good a sailor as themselves. One offered him a rough blue jersey, while another placed a gold-embroidered Sunday waistcoat at his disposal, with a visible struggle between kind-

ness of heart and economy. The first was accepted, but the waistcoat was given back with a kind laugh and an assurance that the jersey was sufficient.

The Englishman knew too well with whom he was dealing to harbour any ill-feeling against the ignorant fishermen or even towards the Abbé Drucquer for the rough treatment he had received. The former were poor, and money never was beaten by a scruple in open combat yet. The latter, he rightly presumed, was only obeying a mandate he dared not dispute. The authority was to him Divine, the command came from one whom he had sworn to look up to and obey as the earthly representative of his Master.

At length the deck was cleared, and order reigned on board, though the mainsail could not be set until the weather moderated

Then Hoel Grall came up to the young Englishman and said :

‘ Monsieur, let us carry the “ patron ” down below. It is not right for the dead to lie there in this wind and storm.’

‘ I am willing,’ answered Christian, looking towards the spot where the dead man lay.

‘ Then, perhaps—Monsieur,’ began the Breton with some hesitation.

‘ Yes,’ answered Christian encouragingly, ‘ what is it ? ’

‘ Perhaps Monsieur will speak to—to the Abbé. It is that we do not like to disturb him in prayer.’

The young Englishman bowed his head with characteristic decision.

‘ I will do so,’ he said gravely. Then he crawled across the deck and touched René

Drucquer's shoulder. The priest did not look up until the touch had been repeated.

'Yes,' he murmured; 'yes. What do you want?'

Christian guessed at the words, for in the tumult of the gale he could not hear them.

'Is it not better to take him below?' he shouted.

Then for the first time did the priest appear to remember that this was not one of the sailors.

'I beg your pardon,' he said, rising from his knees. 'You are right; it is better. But I am afraid the men will not assist me. They are afraid of touching the dead when they are afloat.'

'I will help you,' said Christian simply, 'and that man also, I think, because he proposed it.'

With a motion of the head he indicated

Hoel Grall, upon whom the command of the little vessel had now devolved. The man was better educated than his companions, and spoke French fluently, but in the Breton character superstition is so deeply rooted that generations of education will scarcely eradicate it.

The priest looked into the Englishman's face with a gentle wonder in his eyes, which were shadowy with the fervour of his recent devotions. The two men were crouching low upon the deck, grasping the black rail with their left hands ; the water washed backwards and forwards around their feet.

It was the first time they had seen each other face to face in open daylight, and their eyes met quietly and searchingly as they swayed from side to side with the heavy lurching of the ship. The Englishman spoke first.

‘ You must leave it to us,’ he said calmly.  
‘ You could do nothing in this heavy sea with  
your one arm ! ’

The gentle blue eyes were again filled with wonder, and presently the priest’s intellectual face relaxed into a shadowy smile, which did not affect his thin red lips.

‘ You are very good,’ he murmured simply.

Christian did not hear this remark. He had turned away to call Grall towards him, and was about to move towards the body lying on the hatch, when the priest called him back.

‘ Monsieur,’ he said.

‘ Yes.’

‘ Tell me,’ continued René Drucquer quickly, as if in doubt, ‘ are you Christian Vellacott ? ’

‘ Of course ! ’

The priest looked relieved, and at the same time he appeared to be making an effort to restrain himself, as if he had been betrayed into a greater show of feeling than was desirable. When he at length spoke in reply to the Englishman's obvious desire for some explanation of the strange question, his voice was singularly cold, and modulated in such a manner as to deprive it of any expression, while his eyes were fixed on the deck.

'You are not such as I expected,' he said.

Christian looked down at him with straightforward keenness, and he saw the priest's eyelids move uneasily beneath his gaze. Mixing with many men as he had done, he had acquired a certain mental sureness of touch, like that of an artist with his brush when he has handled many subjects and many effects. He divined that René Drucquer had been led

to expect a violent headstrong man, and he could not restrain a smile as he turned away.

Before going, however, he said :

‘At present it is a matter of saving the ship, and our lives. My own affairs can wait, but when this gale is over you may rest assured they shall have my attention.’

## CHAPTER XX

## WINGED

BEYOND this one allusion to their respective positions, Christian was silent regarding his captivity. After the gale subsided the weather took a turn for the better, and clear skies by day and night rendered navigation an easy matter.

With characteristic daring the young Englishman had decided to offer no resistance and to seize no opportunities of escape until the termination of the voyage. The scheme half-formed within his mind was to see the voyage through, and effect his escape soon after landing in France. It was not without

a certain adventurous fascination, and in the meantime there was much to interest him in his surroundings. If this young Abbé was a typical member of the Society of Jesus, he was worth studying. If this simplicity was an acquired cloak to deeper thought, it was worth penetrating, and if the man's entire individuality had been submerged in the mysterious system followed in the College of Jesuits, it was no waste of time to seek for the real man beneath the cultivated suavity that hid all feeling.

The more the two young men saw of each other the closer grew their intimacy, and with growing intimacy the domination of the stronger individuality was more marked in its influence.

To the frail and nervous priest this young Englishman was a new experience ; his vitality and calm straightforward manner of

speech were such as the Abbé had never met with before. Such men and better men there were and are in the Society of Jesus, otherwise the power of the great Order would not be what it is; but René Drucquer had never come in contact with them. According to the wonderful code of laws laid down by its great founder (who, in other circumstances, might have prepared the world for the coming of such a man as Napoleon the First), the education of the young is entrusted to such brethren as are of slower parts; and from these honest, but by no means intelligent, men the young Abbé had learnt his views upon mankind in general. The creed they taught without understanding it themselves was that no man must give way to natural impulses; that he must restrain and quell and quench himself into a machine, without individuality or impulse, without likes or dislikes; that he

must persistently perform such duties as are abhorrent to him, eat such food as nauseates him, and submit to the dictates of such men as hate him. And these, forsooth, are the teachings of one who, in his zealous shortsightedness, claims to have received his inspiration direct from the lips of the Great Teacher.

René Drucquer found himself in the intimate society of a man who said what he thought, acted as he conceived best, and held himself responsible, for word or deed, to none on earth. It was his first mission after a long and rigorous training. This was the first enemy of the Holy Church against whom he had been sent to fight, armed with the immeasurable power of the greatest brotherhood the world has ever known, protected by the shadow of its blessing; and there was creeping into the young priest's heart a vague

and terrible suspicion that there might be two sides to the question. All the careful years of training, all the invisible meshes of the vast net that had been gathering its folds round him since he had first donned the dress of a Probationer of the College of Jesuits, were powerless to restrain the flight of a pure and guileless heart to the height of truth. Despite the countless one-sided and ingenious arguments instilled into his eager young mind in guise of mental armour against the dangers of the world, René Drucquer found himself, at the very first contact with the world, unconvinced that he was fighting upon the righteous side.

Brest had been left behind in a shimmering blue haze. Ahead lay the grim Pointe de Raz, with its short, thick-set lighthouse facing the vast Atlantic. Out to sea, in the fading glory of sunset, lay the long, low Ile-de-Sein,

while here and there black rocks peeped above the water. The man holding the tiller was a sardine fisher, to whom every rock, every ripple of these troubled waters was familiar. Fearlessly he guided the yawl close round by the high cliff—the westernmost point of Europe—but with the sunset the wind had dropped and the sails hung loosely, while the broad bows glided onwards with no sound of parted water.

The long Atlantic roll was swinging lazily in, and the yawl rose to it sleepily, with a long, slow movement. The distant roar of the surf upon the Finisterre coast rose in the peaceful atmosphere like a lullaby. The holy calm of sunset, the hush of lowering night, and the presence of the only man who had ever drawn him with the strange, unaccountable bond that we call sympathy, moved the heart of the young priest as it had never

been moved before by anything but religious fervour.

For the first time he spoke of himself. The solitary heart suddenly broke through the restraining influence of a mistaken education, and unfolded its sad story of a misread existence. Through no fault of his own, by no relaxation of supervising care on the part of his teachers, the Jesuit had run headlong into the very danger which his Superior had endeavoured to avoid. He had formed a friendship. Fortunately the friend was a *man*, otherwise René Drucquer were lost indeed.

‘I should think,’ he said musingly, ‘that no two lives have ever been so widely separated as yours and mine, and yet our paths have met !’

Vellacott took the cigarette from his lips. It was made of a vile tobacco, called ‘Petit

'Caporal,' but there was nothing better to be had, and he was in the habit of making the best of everything. Therefore he blew into the air a spiral column of thin blue smoke with a certain sense of enjoyment before replying. He also was looking across the glassy expanse of water, but his gaze was steady and thoughtful, while his companion's eyes were dreamy and almost vacant. The light shone full upon his face, and a physician—or a mother—would have noticed, perhaps, that there was beneath his eyes a dull shadow, while his lips were dry and somewhat drawn.

'Yes,' he said at length, with grave sympathy, 'we have drifted together like two logs in a torrent.'

The young priest changed his position, drawing in one leg and clasping his hands round his knee. The movement caused his

long black garment to fall aside, displaying the dark purple stockings and rough shoes. The hands clasped round his knee were long and white, with peculiarly flat wrists.

‘One log,’ he said vaguely, ‘was bound for a certain goal, the other was drifting.’

Vellacott turned slowly and glanced at his companion’s face. The smoke from the bad cigarette drifted past their heads to windward. He was not sure whether the priest was speaking from a professional point of view, with reference to heresy and the unknown goal to which all heretics are drifting, or not. Had René Drucquer been a good Jesuit, he would have seen this opportunity of saying a word in season. But this estimable desire found no place in his heart just then.

‘Your life,’ he continued in a monotone, ‘is already mapped out—like the voyage of a

ship traced across a chart. Is it not so? I have imagined it like that.'

Vellacott continued to smoke for some moments in silence. He sat with his long legs stretched out in front of him, his back against the rail, and his rough blue jersey wrinkled up so that he could keep one hand in his pocket. The priest turned to look at him with a sudden fear that his motives might be misread. Vellacott interpreted his movement thus, for he spoke at once with a smile on his face.

'I think it is best,' he said, 'not to think too much about it. From what experience I have had, I have come to the humiliating conclusion that men have very little to do with the formation of their own lives. A ship-captain may sit down and mark his course across the chart with the greatest accuracy, the most profound knowledge of

wind and current, and the keenest foresight : but that will have very little effect upon the actual voyage.'

'But,' argued the priest in a low voice, 'is it not better to have an end in view—to have a certain aim, and a method, more or less formed, of attaining it.'

'Most men have that,' answered Christian, 'but do not know that they have it !'

'*You* have ?'

Christian smoked meditatively. A month ago he would have said 'Yes' without a moment's hesitation.

'And you know it, I think,' added the priest slowly. He was perfectly innocent of any desire to extract details of his companion's life from unwilling lips, and Christian knew it. He was convinced that, whatever part René Drucquer had attempted to play in the past, he was sincere at that moment, and

he divined that the young Jesuit was weakly giving way to a sudden desire to speak to some fellow-being of his own life—to lay aside the strict reserve demanded by the tenets of the Society to which he was irrevocably bound. In his superficial way, Christian Vellacott had studied men as well as letters, and he was not ignorant of the influence exercised over the human mind by such trifling circumstances as moonshine upon placid water, distant music, the solemn hush of eventide, or the subtle odour of a beloved flower. If René Drucquer was on the point of committing a great mistake, he at least would not urge him on towards it, so he smoked in silence, looking practical and unsympathetic.

The priest laughed a little short deprecating laugh, in which there was no shadow of mirth.

‘I have not,’ he said, rubbing his slim hands together, palm to palm, slowly, ‘and—I know it.’

‘It will come,’ suggested the Englishman, after a pause.

The priest shook his head with a little smile, which was infinitely sadder than tears. His cold silence was worse than an outburst of grief; it was like the keen frost that comes before snow, harder to bear than the snow itself. Presently he moved slightly towards his companion so that their arms were touching, and in his soft, modulated voice, trained to conceal emotion, he told his story.

‘My friend,’ he said, intertwining his fingers, which were very restless, ‘no man can be the worse for hearing the story of another man’s life. Before you judge of me, listen to what my life has been. I have never known a friend or relation. I have never had

a boy companion. Since the age of thirteen, when I was placed under the care of the holy fathers, I have never spoken to a woman. I have been taught that life was given us to be spent in prayer; to study, to train ourselves, and to follow in the footsteps of the blessed Saint Ignatius. But how are we who have only lived half a life, to imitate him, whose youth and middle-age were passed in one of the most vicious courts of Europe before he thought of turning to holy things? How are we, who are buried in an atmosphere of mystic religion, to cope with sin of which we know nothing, and when we are profoundly ignorant of its evil results? These things I know now, but I did not suspect them when I was in the college. There, all manliness, and all sense of manly honour were suppressed and insidiously forbidden. We were taught to be spies upon each other, to cringe servilely to

our superiors, and to deal treacherously with such as were beneath us. Hypocrisy—innate, unfathomable hypocrisy—was instilled into our minds so cunningly that we did not recognise it. Every movement of the head or hands, every glance of the eyes, and every word from the lips was to be the outcome—not of our own hearts—but of a law laid down by the General himself. It simply comes to this: we are not men at all, but machines carefully planned and fitted together, so as to render sin almost an impossibility. When tempted to sin we are held back, not by the fear of God, but by the thought that discovery is almost certain, and that the wrath of our Superior is withheld by no scruple or human kindness. . . . But remember, I knew nothing of this before I took my vows. To me it was a glorious career. I became an enthusiast. At last the time came when I

was eligible ; I offered myself to the Society, and was accepted. Then followed a period of hard work ; I learnt Spanish and Italian, giving myself body and soul to the work. Even the spies set to watch me day and night, waking and sleeping, feeding and fasting, could but confess that I was sincere. One day the Provincial sent for me—my mission had come. I was at last to go forth into the world to do the work of my Master. Trembling with eagerness I went to his room ; the Provincial was a young man with a beautiful face, but it was like the face of the dead. There was no colour, no life, no soul, no heart in it. He spoke in a low measured voice that had neither pity nor love.

‘ When that door closed behind me an hour later the scales had fallen from my eyes. I began to suspect that this great edifice,

built not of stones but of men's hearts, was nothing less than an unrighteous mockery. With subtle double-meaning words, the man whom I had been taught to revere as the authorised representative of Our Lord, unfolded to me my duties in the future. The work of God, he called it; and to do this work he placed in my hands the tools of the Devil. What I suspected then, I know now.'

The young Englishman sat and listened with increasing interest. His cigarette had gone out long before.

'And,' he said presently, in his quiet reassuring voice, which seemed to infer that no difficulty in life was quite insurmountable — 'And, if you did not know it then, how have you learnt it now?'

'From you, my friend,' replied the priest, earnestly, 'from you and from these rough

sailors. They, at least, are men. But you have taught me this.'

Christian Vellacott made no answer. He knew that what his companion said was true. Unconsciously, and with no desire to do so, he had opened this young zealot's eyes to what a man's life may be. The tale was infinitely sad, but with characteristic promptitude the journalist was already seeking a remedy without stopping to think over the pathos of this mistaken career.

Presently René Drucquer's quick, painful tones broke the silence again, and he continued his story.

'He told me,' he said, 'that in times gone by we had ruled the Roman Catholic world invisibly from the recesses of kings' cabinets and queens' boudoirs. That now the power has left us, but that the Order is as firm as ever, nearly as rich, and quite

as intelligent. It lies like a huge mill, perfect but idle, waiting for the grist that will never come to be crushed between its ruthless wheels. He told me that the sway over kings and princes has lapsed with the growth of education, but that we hold still within our hands a lever of greater power, though the danger of wielding it is proportionately greater to those who would use it. This power is the People. Before us lies a course infinitely more perilous than the sinuous paths trodden by the first followers of St. Ignatius as they advanced towards power. It lies on the troubled waters ; it leads over the restless, mobile heads of the people.'

Again the priest ceased speaking. There was a strange thrill of foreboding in his voice, which, however, had never been raised above a monotone. The two men sat side by side, as still as the dead. They gazed

vacantly into the golden gates of the west, and each in his own way thought over these things. Assuredly the Angel of Silence hung over that little vessel then, for no sound from earth or sea or sky came to wake those two thinkers from their reverie.

At last the Englishman's full steady tones broke the hush.

‘This,’ he said, ‘has not been learnt in two days. You must have known it before. If you knew it, why are you what you are? You never have been a real Jesuit, and you never will be.’

‘I swore to the Mother of God—I am bound. . . .’

‘By an oath forced upon you! ’

‘No! By an oath I myself begged to take! ’

This was the bitterest drop in the priest's cup. Everything had been done of his own

free will—at his own desire. During eleven years a network of perfidy had been cunningly woven around him, mesh after mesh, day after day. As he grew older, so grew in strength the warp of the net. Thus, in the fulness of time, everything culminated to the one great end in view. Nothing was demanded (for that is an essential rule), everything must be offered freely, to be met by an apparently hesitating acceptance. Constant dropping wears the hardest stone in time.

‘But,’ said Vellacott, ‘you can surely represent to your Provincial that you are not fitted for the work put before you.’

‘My friend,’ interrupted the priest, ‘we can represent nothing. We are supposed to have no natural inclinations. All work should be welcome, none too difficult, no task irksome.’

'You can volunteer for certain services,' said Vellacott.

The priest shrugged his shoulders.

'What services?' he asked.

The Englishman looked at him for some seconds in the fading light. In his quick way he had already found a remedy, and he was wondering whether he should propose it or hold his peace. He was not afraid of incurring responsibility. The young Jesuit had appealed to him, and there was a way out of the difficulty. Christian felt that things could not be made worse than they were. In a moment his mind was made up.

'As you know,' he said, 'the Society has few friends and a multitude of enemies. I am afraid I am an enemy; but there is one redeeming point in the Jesuit record

which we are all bound to recognise, and I recognise it unhesitatingly. You have done more to convert the heathen than the rest of the Christian Church put together. Whatever the motive has been, whatever the results have proved to be, the missionary work is unrivalled. Why do you not offer yourself for that ?'

As he asked the question Christian glanced at his companion's face. He saw the sad eyes light up suddenly with a glow that was not of this dull earth at all ; he saw the thin pure face suddenly acquire a great and wondrous peace. The young priest rose to his feet, and, crossing the deck, he stood holding with one hand to the tarred rigging, his back turned towards the Englishman, looking over the still waters.

Presently he returned, and laying his thin

hand upon Christian's shoulder, he said, 'My friend, you have saved me. In the first shock of my disillusion I never thought of this. I think—I think there is work for me yet.'

## CHAPTER XXI

## TRUE TO HIS CLOTH

WITH the morning tide, the *Deux Frères* entered Audierne harbour. The rough sailors crossed themselves as they looked towards the old wooden cross upon the headland, facing the great Atlantic. They thought of the dead ‘patron’ in the little cabin below, and the joyous young wife, whose snowy head-dress they could almost distinguish upon the pier among the waiters there.

Both Christian Vellacott and the Abbé were on deck. They had been there the whole night. They had lain motionless side

by side upon the old sail. Day vanished, night stole on, and day came again without either having closed his eyes or opened his lips.

They now stood near the steersman, and looked upon the land with an interest which only comes after heavy weather at sea. To the Englishman this little fishing-port was unknown, and he did not care to ask. The vessel was now dropping up the river, with anchor swinging, and the women on the pier were walking inland slowly, keeping pace and waving a greeting from time to time in answer to a husband's shout.

'That is she, Monsieur L'Abbé,' said Hoel Grall, with a peculiar twitch of his coarse mouth, as if from pain. 'That is she with the little child!'

René Drucquer bowed his head, saying nothing. The *Deux Frères* slowly edged

alongside the old quay in her usual berth above the sardine boats. A board was thrown across from the rail to the quay, and the priest stepped ashore alone. He went towards the smiling young wife without any hesitation ; she stood there surrounded by the wives of the sailors on board the *Deux Frères*, with her snowy coiffe and spotless apron, holding her golden-haired child by the hand. All the women curtsied as the priest approached, for in these western provinces the Church is still respected.

‘My daughter,’ said the Abbé, ‘I have bad news for you.’

She smiled still, misunderstanding his calmness.

‘Ah, mon père,’ she said, ‘it is the season of the great winds now. What a long voyage it has been ! And you say it is a bad one. My husband is no doubt in despair, but

another voyage is sure to be better ; is it not so ? I have not seen Loic upon the deck, but then my sight is not good. I am not from Audierne, mon père, but from inland where we cannot see so far.'

The priest changed colour ; no smile came into his face in response to hers. He stepped nearer, and placed his hand upon her comely arm.

' It has been a very bad voyage for your poor husband,' he said. ' The Holy Virgin give you comfort.'

Slowly the colour vanished from the woman's round cheeks. Her soft short-sighted eyes filled with a terrible, hopeless dismay as she stared at the young priest's bowed head. The women round now began to understand, and they crossed themselves with a very human prayer of thankfulness

that their husbands and brothers had been spared.

‘Loic is dead?’ she said, in a rasping voice. For some moments she stood motionless, then, in obedience to some strange and unaccountable instinct, she began turning up the sleeves of her rough brown dress, as if she were going to begin some kind of manual work.

‘The Holy Virgin comfort you, my daughter; and you, my little one,’ said the priest, as he stooped to lay his hand upon the golden head of the child.

‘Loic is dead! Loic is dead!’ spread from mouth to mouth.

‘That comes from having aught to do with the priests,’ muttered the customs officer, beneath his heavy moustache. He was an old soldier, who read the newspapers,

and spoke in a loud voice on Sunday evenings in the Café de l'Ouest.

The Abbé heard the remark, and looked at the man, but said nothing. He remembered that no Jesuit must defend himself.

The girl-widow stepped on board the untidy vessel in a mechanical dreamy way. She dragged the little trotting child almost roughly after her. Christian Vellacott stood at the low cabin-door. He was in the dress of a Probationer of the Society of Jesus, which he had assumed at the request, hesitatingly made, of René Drucquer, and for the very practical reason that he had nothing else to wear except a torn dress-coat and Hoel Grall's Sunday garments.

‘Bless me, mon père,’ lisped the little one, stopping in front of him.

‘Much good will a blessing of mine do you, little one,’ he muttered in English.

Nevertheless, he lifted the child up and kissed her rosy cheek. He kept her by his side, letting the mother go to her dead husband alone.

When the woman came from the cabin half-an-hour later, hard-faced, and with dry, stony eyes, she found the child sitting on Christian's knee, pratdling away in broken French. Tears came to her aching eyes at the sight of the happy, fatherless child ; the hard Breton heart was touched at last.

The Abbé's instructions were to keep his prisoner confined under lock and key in the cabin until nightfall, when he was to be removed inland in a carriage under the surveillance of two lay-brethren. Christian, however, never for a moment doubted his ability to escape when he wished to do so, and acting upon this conviction he volunteered a promise not to attempt evasion.

Dressed as he was, in the garments of a probationer, there was no necessity of awaiting nightfall, as there was nothing unusual about him to attract attention. Accordingly the departure from the *Deux Frères* was fixed for midday. In the meantime the young Englishman found himself the object of unremitting attention on the part of two smooth-faced individuals who looked like domestic servants. These two men had come on board at the same moment that the Abbé stepped ashore, and Christian noticed that no word of greeting or recognition passed between them and René Drucquer. This was to him a further proof of the minuteness of organisation which has characterised the Order since Ignatius Loyola wrote down his wonderful ‘Constitutions,’ in which no trifle was too small to be worthy of attention, no

petty dramatic effect devoid of significance. Each man appeared to have received his instructions separately, and with no regard to those of his companion.

In the meantime, however, the journalist had not been wasting his time. Although he still looked upon the whole affair as a very good farce, he had not forgotten the fact that his absence must necessarily have been causing endless anxiety in England. During the long night of wakefulness he had turned over in his mind every possible event at St. Mary Western since his sudden disappearance. Again and again he found himself wondering how they would all take it, and his conclusions were remarkably near to the truth. He guessed that Mr. Bodery would, sooner or later, be called in to give his opinion, and he sincerely hoped that the

course taken would be the waiting tactics which had actually been proposed by the editor of the ‘Beacon.’

In this hope he determined to communicate with Sidney Carew, and having possessed himself of a blank Customs Declaration Form he proceeded to write a letter upon the reverse side of it. In this he told his friend to have no anxiety, and, above all, to institute no manner of search, because he would return to England as soon as his investigations were complete. The letter was written in guarded language, because Christian had arrived at the conclusion that the only means he had of despatching it was through the hands of René Drucquer. The crew of the *Deux Frères* were not now allowed to speak with him. He possessed no money, and it would have been folly to attempt posting an unstamped letter ad-

dressed to England in a little place like Audierne.

Accordingly, as they were preparing to leave the vessel (the care of poor Loic having been handed over to the village curé), Christian boldly tendered his request.

‘No, my friend, I cannot do it,’ replied the Abbé promptly.

‘Read it yourself,’ urged Christian. ‘No harm can possibly come of it. My friend will do exactly as I tell him. In fact, it will be to your benefit that it should go.’

Still the Jesuit shook his head. Suddenly, however, in the midst of an argument on the part of the Englishman, he gave in and took the letter.

‘Give it to me,’ he said ; ‘I will risk it.’

Christian watched him place the letter within the breast of his ‘soutane,’ unread. The two lay-brethren were noting every movement.

Presently the priest removed his broad-brimmed hat and passed through the little doorway into the dimly-lighted cabin where the dead sailor lay. He left the door ajar. After glancing at the dead man's still face he fell upon his knees by the side of the low bunk, and remained with bowed head for some moments. At last he rose to his feet and took the Englishman's letter from his breast. The envelope was unclosed, and with smooth, deliberate touch he opened the letter and read it by the light of the candle at the dead man's head, of which the rays were to illuminate the wandering soul upon its tortuous way. The priest read each word slowly and carefully, for his knowledge of English was limited. Then he stood for some seconds motionless, with arms hanging straight, staring at the flame of the candle with weary, wondering eyes. At last he

raised his hand and held the flimsy paper in the flame of the candle till it was all burnt away. The charred remains fluttered to the ground, and one wavering flake of carbonised paper sank gently upon the dead man's throat, laid bare by the hand of his frenzied wife.

'He said that I was not a Jesuit,' murmured the priest, as he burnt the envelope, and across his pale face there flitted an unearthly smile.

Scarcely had the thin smoke mingled with the incense-laden air when Christian pushed open the door. The two men looked their last upon the rigid face dimly illuminated by the light of the wavering candles, and then turned to leave the ship.

The carriage was waiting for them on the quay, and Christian noticed that the two men who had been watching him since his arrival

at Audierne were on the box. René Drucquer and himself were invited to enter the roomy vehicle, and by the way in which the door shut he divined that it was locked by a spring.

At the village post-office the carriage stopped, and, one of the servants having opened the door, the priest descended and passed into the little bureau. He said nothing about the letter addressed to Sidney Carew, but Christian took for granted that it would be posted. Instead of this, however, the priest wrote a telegram announcing the arrival of the *Deux Frères*, which he addressed to ‘Morel et Fils, Merchants, Quimper.’

‘Hoel Grall asked me to despatch this,’ he said, quietly, as he handed the paper to the old postmaster.

After this short halt the carriage made its

way rapidly inland. Thus they travelled through the fair Breton country together, these two strangely-contrasting men brought together by a chain of circumstances of which the links were the merest coincidences. Christian Vellacott did not appear to chafe against his confinement. He took absolutely no notice of the two men whose duty it was to watch his every movement. The spirit of adventure, which is not quite educated out of us Englishmen yet, was very strong in him, and the rapid movement through an unknown land to an unknown goal was not without its healthy fascination. He lay back in the comfortable carriage and sleepily watched the flying landscape. Withal he noticed by the position of the sun the direction in which he was being taken, and despite many turns and twists he kept his bearings fairly well. The carriage had left the high

road soon after crossing the bridge above Audierne, and was now going somewhat heavily over inferior thoroughfares.

The sun had set before Vellacott awoke to find that they were still lumbering on. He had, of course, lost all bearing now, but he soon found that they had been journeying eastward since leaving the coast.

A halt was made for refreshment at a small hill-side village which appeared to be mainly inhabited by women, for the men were all sailors. The accommodation was of the poorest, but bread was procurable, and eggs, meat being an unknown luxury in the community.

In the lowering light they journeyed on again, sometimes on the broad post-road, sometimes through cool and sombre forests. Many times when Christian spoke kindly, or performed some little act of consideration,

the poor Abbé was on the point of disclosing his own treason. Before his eyes was the vision of that little cabin. He saw again the dancing flame of the paper in his hand, throwing its moving light upon the marble features of that silent witness as the charred fragments fluttered past the still face to the ground. But as the stone is worn by the dropping water, so at last is man's better nature overcome by persistent undermining when the work is carried out by men chosen as possessing 'a mind self-possessed and tranquil, delicate in its perceptions, sure in its intuitions, and capable of a wide comprehension of various subjects.' What youthful nature could be strong enough to resist the cunning pressure of influences wielded thus? So René Drucquer carried the secret in his heart until circumstances rendered it unimportant.

Man is, after all, only fallible, and those to whom is given the privilege of accepting or refusing candidates for admission to the great Society of Jesus had made a fatal error in taking René Drucquer. Never was a man more unfitted to do his duty in that station of life in which he was placed. His religious enthusiasm stopped short of fanaticism ; his pliability would not bend so low as duplicity. All this the young journalist learnt as he penetrated further into the sensitive depths of his companion's gentle temperament. The priest was of those men to whom love and brotherly affection are as necessary as the air they breathe. His wavering instincts were capable of being hardened into convictions ; his natural gifts (and they were many) could be raised into talents ; his life, in fact, could have been made a success by one influence—the love of a woman—the one influence that

was forbidden : the single human acquirement that must for ever be beyond the priest's reach. This Christian Vellacott felt in a vague, uncertain way. He did not know very much about love and its influence upon a man's character, these questions never having come under his journalistic field of inquiry ; but he had lately begun to wonder whether man's life was given to him to be influenced by no other thoughts than those in his own brain—whether there is not in our existence a completing era in the development of character.

Looking at the matter from his own personal point of view—from whence even the best of us look upon most things—he was of the opinion that love stands in the path of the majority of men. This had been his view of the matter for many years ; probably it was the reflection of his father's cynically out-

spoken opinion, and a well-grown idea is hard to uproot.

Brought up, as he had been, by a pleasure-seeking and somewhat cynical man, and passing from his care into the busy and practical journalistic world, it was only natural that he should have acquired a certain hardness of judgment which, though useful in the world, is not an amiable quality. He now felt the presence of a dawning charity towards the actions of his fellow men. A month earlier he would have despised René Drucquer as a weak and incapable man ; now there was in his heart only pity for the young priest.

Soon after darkness had settled over the country the carriage descended into a deep and narrow valley through which ran a rapid river of no great breadth. Here the driver stopped, and the two travellers descended

from the vehicle. The priest exchanged a few words in a low voice with one of the servants who had leapt down from the box, and then turning to Vellacott he said in a curt manner—

‘Follow me, please.’

The Englishman obeyed, and leaving the road they turned along a broad pathway running at the side of the water. Christian noticed that they were going up-stream. Presently they reached a cottage, and a woman came from the open doorway at their approach. Without any greeting or word of welcome she led the way down some wooden steps to the ferry-boat. As she rowed them across, the journalist took note of everything in his quick, keen way. The depth of the water, rapidity of current, and even the fact that the boat woman was not paid for her services.

‘Are we near our destination?’ he asked in English, when he saw this.

‘We have five minutes more,’ replied the priest in the same language.

On landing, they followed another small path for some distance, down-stream. It was a quiet moss-grown path, with poplar trees on either side, and appeared to be little used. Suddenly the young priest stopped. There was the trunk of an elm-tree lying on the inside of the path, evidently cut for the purpose of making a rough seat.

‘Let us sit here a few minutes,’ said René.

Christian obeyed. He sat forward and stretched his long legs out.

‘I am aching all over,’ he said, impatiently; ‘I wonder what it means!’

The priest ignored the remark entirely.

‘My friend,’ he said, presently, ‘a few

minutes more and my care of you ceases. This journey will be over. For me it has been very eventful. In these few days I have learnt more than I did during all the long years of my education, and what I have learnt will never be forgotten. Without breathing one word of religion you have taught me to respect yours ; without uttering a single complaint you have made me think with horror and shame of the part I have played in this affair. I dare . . . scarcely hope that one day you will forgive me ! ’

Christian raised his hand slowly to his forehead. The gleam of the sleek, smooth water flowing past his feet made him giddy. He wondered vaguely if the strange, dull feeling that was creeping over his senses was the result of extreme fatigue.

‘ You speak as if we were never going to meet again,’ he said, dreamily.

The priest did not answer for some moments. His slim hands were tightly clasped upon his knees.

‘It is probable,’ he said at length, ‘that such will be the case. If our friendship is discovered it is certain !’

‘Then our friendship must not be discovered,’ said the practical Englishman.

‘But, my friend, that would be deceit—duplicity !’

‘A little duplicity, more or less, cannot matter much,’ replied Christian, in a harder voice.

The priest looked up sharply, half-fearing that his own treachery in the matter of the letter was suspected. But his companion remained silent, and the darkness prevented the expression of his face from being seen.

‘And,’ continued the Englishman, after a long pause, ‘I am to be left here ?’

There was a peculiar ring of weary indifference in his tone, as if it mattered little where he was left. The priest noticed it and remembered it later.

‘I know nothing, my friend. I have but to obey my orders.’

‘And close your mind against thought?’

‘I cannot prevent the thoughts from coming into my mind,’ replied the priest gently, ‘but I can keep them prisoners when they have entered.’

He rose suddenly, and led the way along the river bank. Had Christian’s manner been more encouraging he would have told him then and there about the letter.

As they passed along the narrow footpath, the dim form of a man rose from behind the log of wood upon which they had been sitting. It was one of the lay brethren who had accompanied them from Audierne. Con-

trary to René Drucquer's whispered instructions, he had followed them after quitting the carriage and had crept up behind the poplars unheard and unsuspected. He came, however, too late. Unconsciously, Christian had saved his companion.

## CHAPTER XXII

## GREEK AND GREEK

WHEN they had walked about a hundred yards farther on, the footpath was brought to a sudden termination by a house built across it to the water's edge. In this lay the explanation of its scanty use and luxuriant growth of moss.

It was not a dark night, and without difficulty the priest found the handle of a bell, of which, however, no sound reached their ears. The door, cut deep in the stone, was opened after a short delay by a lay brother who showed no signs of rigid fasting. Again Christian noticed that no greeting was ex-

changed, no word of explanation offered or expected. The lay brother led the way along a dimly-lighted corridor, in which there were doors upon each side at regular intervals. There was a chill and stony feeling in the atmosphere.

At the end of the corridor a gleam of light shone through a half-open door upon the bare stone floor. Into this cell Christian was shown. Without even noticing whether the priest followed him or not, he entered the tiny room and threw himself wearily upon the bed. Although it was an intensely hot night he shivered a little, and as he lay he clasped his head with either hand. His eyes were dull and lifeless, and the colour had entirely left his cheeks, though his lips were red and moist. He took no notice of his surroundings, which, though simple and somewhat bare, were not devoid of comfort.

In the meantime, René Drucquer had followed the door-keeper up a broad flight of stairs to a second corridor which was identical with that below, except that a room took the place of this small entrance-lobby and broad door. Thus the windows of this room were immediately above the river, which rendered them entirely free from overlookers, as the land on the opposite side was low and devoid of trees.

The lay brother stopped in front of the door of this apartment, and allowed the young priest to pass him and knock at the door with his own hands. The response from within was uttered in such a low tone that if he had not been listening most attentively René would not have heard it. He opened the door, which creaked a little on its hinges, and passed into the room alone.

In front of him a man dressed in a black

soutane was seated at a table placed before the window. The only lamp in the room, which was long and narrow, stood on the table before him, so that the light of it was reflected from his sleek black head disfigured by a tiny tonsure. As René Drucquer advanced up the room, the occupant raised his head slightly, but made no attempt to turn round. With a quick, unobtrusive movement of his large white hand he moved the papers on the table before him, so that no written matter remained exposed to view. Upon the table were several books, and on the right hand side of the plain inkstand stood a beautifully carved stone crucifix, while upon the left there was a small mirror no larger than a carte-de-visite. This was placed at a slight angle upon a tiny wire easel, and by raising his eyes any person seated at the table could at once see what was passing in the room.

behind him—the entire apartment, including the door, being reflected in the mirror.

Though seated, the occupant of this peculiarly constructed room was evidently tall. His shoulders, though narrow, were very square, and in any other garment than a thin soutane his slightness of build would scarcely have been noticeable. His head was of singular and remarkable shape. Very narrow from temple to temple, it was quite level from the summit of the high forehead to the spot where the tonsure gleamed whitely, and the length of the skull from front to back was abnormal. The dullest observer could not have failed to recognise that there was something extraordinary in such a head, either for good or evil.

The Abbé Drucquer advanced across the bare stone floor, and took his stand at the left

side of the table, within a yard of his Provincial's elbow.

Before taking any notice of him, the Provincial opened a thick book bound in dark morocco leather, of which the leaves were of white unruled paper, interleaved, like a diary, with blotting-paper. The pages were numbered, although there was, apparently, no index attached to the volume. After a moment's thought, the tall man turned to a certain folio which was partially covered by a fine handwriting in short paragraphs. Then for the first time he looked up.

‘Good evening,’ he said, in full melodious voice. As he raised his face the light of the lamp fell directly upon it. There was evidently no desire to conceal any passing expression by the stale old method of a shaded lamp. The face was worthy of

the head. Clean-cut, calm, and dignified ; it was singularly fascinating, not only by reason of its beauty, which was undeniable, but owing to the calm, almost superhuman power that lay in the gaze of the velvety eyes. There was no keenness of expression, no quickness of glance, and no seeking after effect by mobility of lash or lid. When he raised his eyes, the lower lid was elevated simultaneously, which peculiarity, concealing the white around the pupil, imparted an uncomfortable sense of inscrutability. There was no expression beyond a vague sense of velvety depth, such as is felt upon gazing for some space of time down a deep well.

‘Good evening,’ replied René Drucquer, meeting with some hesitation the slow, kindly glance.

The Provincial lent forward and took

from the tray of the inkstand a quill pen. With the point of it he followed the lines written in the book before him.

‘I understand,’ he said, in a modulated and business-like tone, ‘that you have been entirely successful?’

‘I believe so.’

The Provincial turned his head slightly, as if about to raise his eyes once more to the young priest’s face, but after remaining a moment in the same position with slightly parted lips and the pen poised above the book, he returned to the written notes.

‘You left,’ he continued, ‘on Monday week last. On the Wednesday evening you . . . carried out the instructions given to you. This morning you arrived at Audierne, and came into the harbour at daybreak. Your part has been satisfactorily performed. You have brought your prisoner with all

expedition. So——’ here the Provincial raised the pen from the book with a jerk of his wrist and shrugged his shoulders almost imperceptibly, ‘so—you have been entirely successful?’

Although there was a distinct intention of interrogation in the tone in which this last satisfactory statement was made, the young priest stood motionless and silent. After a pause, the other continued in the same kind, even voice :

‘ What has not been satisfactory to you, my son ? ’

‘ The “patron” of the boat, Loic Plufer, was killed by the breaking of a rope, before we were out of sight of the English coast.’

‘ Ah ! I am sorry. Had you time—were you enabled to administer to him the Holy Rites ? ’

‘No, my father. He was killed at one blow.’

The Provincial laid aside his pen and leant back. His soft eyes rested steadily on the book in front of him.

‘Did the accident have any evil effect upon the crew?’ he asked indifferently.

‘I think not,’ was the reply. ‘I endeavoured to prevent such effect arising, and —and in this the Englishman helped me greatly.’

Without moving a muscle the Provincial turned his eyes towards the young priest. He did not look up into his face, but appeared to be watching his slim hands, which were moving nervously upon the surface of his black soutane.

‘My son,’ he said, smoothly. ‘As you know, I am a great advocate for frankness. Frankness in word and thought, in sub-

ordinate and superior. I have always been frank with you, and from you I expect similar treatment. It appears to me that there is still something unsatisfactory respecting your successfully-executed mission. It is in connection with this Englishman. Is it not so ?'

René Drucquer moved a little, changing his attitude and clasping his hands one over the other.

' He is not such as I expected,' he replied after a pause.

' No,' said the Provincial, meditatively. ' They are a strange race. Some of them are strong—very strong indeed. But most of them are foolish; and singularly self-satisfied. He is intelligent, this one; is it not so ?'

' Yes, I think he is very intelligent.'

' Was he violent or abusive ?'

‘No; he was calm and almost indifferent.’

For some moments the Provincial thought deeply. Then he waved his hand in the direction of a chair which stood with its back towards the window at the end of the table.

‘Take a seat, my son,’ he said, ‘I have yet many questions to ask you. I am afraid I forgot that you might be tired.’

‘Now tell me,’ he continued when René had seated himself, ‘Do you think this indifference was assumed by way of disarming suspicion and for the purpose of effecting a speedy escape?’

‘No!’

‘Did you converse together to any extent?’

‘We were naturally thrown together a great deal; especially after the death of the “patron.” He was of great assistance

to me and to Hoel Grall, the second in command, by reason of his knowledge of seamanship.'

'Ah! He is expert in such matters?'

'Yes, my father.'

A further note was here added to the partially-filled page of the manuscript book.

'Of what subjects did he speak? Of religion, our Order, politics, himself and his captivity?'

'Of none of those.'

The Provincial leant back suddenly in his chair, and for some minutes complete silence reigned in the room. He was evidently thinking deeply, and his eyes were fixed upon the open book with inscrutable immobility. Once he glanced slowly towards René Drucquer, who sat with downcast eyes and interlocked fingers. Then he pressed

back his elbows and inhaled a deep breath, as if weary of sitting in one position.

‘I have met Englishmen,’ he said, speculatively, ‘of a type similar—I think—to this man. They never spoke of religion, of themselves or of their own opinion; and yet they were not silent men. Upon most subjects they could converse intelligently, and upon some with brilliancy; but these subjects were invariably treated in a strictly general sense. Such men *never* argue, and never appear to be highly interested in that of which they happen to be speaking. . . . They make excellent listeners. . . .’ Here the speaker stopped for a moment and passed his long hand downwards across his eyes as if the light were troubling his sight; in doing so he glanced again towards the Abbé’s fingers, which were now

quite motionless, the knuckles gleaming like ivory.

‘ . . . And one never knows quite how much they remember and how much they forget. Perhaps it is that they hear everything . . . and forget nothing. Is our friend of this type, my son?’

‘ I think he is.’

‘ It is such men as he who have made that little island what it is. They are difficult subjects; but they are liable to sacrifice their opportunities to a mistaken creed they call honour, and therefore they are not such dangerous enemies as they otherwise might have been.’

The Provincial said these words in a lighter manner, almost amounting to pleasantry, and did not appear to notice that the priest moved uneasily in his seat.

‘Then,’ he continued, ‘you have learnt nothing of importance during the few days you have passed with him?’

‘Nothing, my father.’

‘Did he make any attempt to communicate with his friends?’

‘He wrote a letter which he requested me to post.’

The Provincial leant forward in his chair and took a pen in his right hand, while he extended his left across the table towards his companion.

‘I burnt it,’ said René, gently.

‘Ah! That is a pity. Why did you do that?’

‘I had discretion!’ replied the young priest, with quiet determination.

The Provincial examined the point of his pen critically, his perfectly-formed lips slightly apart.

‘Yes,’ he murmured, reflectively. ‘Yes, of course, you had discretion. What was in the letter?’

‘A few words in English, telling his friends to have no anxiety, and asking them particularly to institute no search, as he would return home as soon as he desired to do so.’

‘Ah! He said that, did he? And the letter was addressed to——’

‘Mr. Carew.’

‘Thank you.’

The Provincial made another note in the manuscript book. Then he read the whole page over carefully and critically. His attitude was like that of a physician about to pronounce a diagnosis.

‘And,’ he said, reflectively, without looking up, ‘was there nothing noticeable about him in any way? Nothing characteristic of

the man, I mean, and peculiar. How would you describe him, in fact?’

‘I should say,’ replied René Drucquer, ‘that his chief characteristic is energy; but for some reason, during these last two days this seems to have slowly evaporated. His resistance on Wednesday night was very energetic—he dislocated my arm, and reset it later—and when the vessel was in danger he was full of life. Later this peculiar indifference of manner came over him, and hour by hour it has increased in power. It almost seems as if he were anxious to keep away from England just now.’

The Provincial raised his long white finger to his upper lip. It was the action of a man who is in the habit of tugging gently at his moustache when in thought, and one would almost have said that the smooth-faced priest had at no very distant

period worn that manly ornament. His finger passed over the shaded skin with a disagreeable, rasping sound.

‘That does not sound very likely,’ he said slowly. ‘Have you any tangible reason to offer in support of this theory?’

‘No, my father. But the idea came to me, and so I mention it. It seemed as if this desire came to him upon reflection, after the ship was out of danger, and the indifference was contemporaneous with it.’

The Provincial suddenly closed the book and laid aside his pen.

‘Thank you, my son!’ he said, in smooth, heartless tones, ‘I will not trouble you any more to-night. You will need food and rest. Good night, my son. You have done well! ’

René Drucquer rose and gravely passed down the long room. Before he reached the

door, however, the clear voice of his superior caused him to pause for a moment.

‘As you go down to the refectory,’ he said, ‘kindly make a request that Mr. Vellacott be sent to me as soon as he is refreshed. I do not want you to see him before I do! ’

When the door had closed behind René Drucquer the Provincial rose from his seat and slowly paced backwards and forwards from the door to the table. Presently he drew aside the curtain which hid a small recess near the door, where a simple bed and a small table were concealed. With a brush he smoothed back his sleek hair, and, dipping the ends of his fingers into a basin of water, he wiped them carefully. Thus he prepared to receive Christian Vellacott.

He returned to his chair and seated himself somewhat wearily. Although there

were but few papers on the table, he had three hours' hard work before him yet. He leant back, and again that singular gesture, as if to stroke a moustache that was not there, was noticeable.

'I have a dull presentiment,' he muttered reflectively, 'that we have made a mistake here. We have gone about it in the wrong way, and if there is blame to be attached to anyone, Talma is the man. That temper of his is fatal!'

After a pause he heaved a weary sigh, and stretched his long arms out on either side, enjoying a free and open yawn.

'Ah me!' he sighed, 'what an uphill fight this has become, and day by day it grows harder. Day by day we lose power; one hold after another slips from our grasp. Perhaps it means that this vast organisation is effete—perhaps, after all, we are dying of

inanition, and yet—yet it should not be, for we have the People still. . . . Ah ! I hear footsteps. This is our journalistic friend, no doubt. I think he will prove interesting.'

A moment later someone knocked softly at the door. There was a slight shuffling of feet, and Christian Vellacott entered the room alone. There was a peculiar dull expression in his eyes, as if he were suffering pain, mental or physical. After glancing at the mirror, the Provincial rose and bowed formally with his hand upon the back of his chair. As the Englishman came forward the Jesuit glanced at his face, and with a polite motion of the hand he said :

'Sir, take the trouble of seating yourself,' speaking in French at once, with no apology, as if well aware that his companion knew that language as perfectly as his own.

‘Thank you,’ replied Christian. He drew the chair slightly forward as he seated himself, and fixed his eyes upon the Jesuit’s face. Through the entire interview he never removed his gaze, and he noticed that until the last words were spoken those soft, deep eyes were never raised to his.

‘I suppose,’ said the Jesuit at length, almost humbly, ‘that we are irreconcilable enemies, Mr. Vellacott?’

The manner in which this was spoken did not bear the slightest resemblance to the cold superiority with which René Drucquer had been treated.

The Englishman sat with one lean hand resting on the table and watched. He knew that some reply was expected, but in face of that knowledge he chose to remain silent. It was a case of Greek meeting Greek. The inscrutable Provincial had met a foeman worthy

of his steel at last. His strange magnetic influence threw itself vainly against a will as firm as his own, and he felt that his incidental effects, dramatic and conversational, fell flat. Instantly he became interested in Christian Vellacott.

‘I need hardly remind a man of your discrimination, Mr. Vellacott,’ he continued tentatively, ‘that there are two sides to every question.’

The Englishman smiled and moved slightly in his chair, drawing in his feet and leaning forward.

‘Implying, I presume,’ he said lightly, ‘that in this particular question you are on one side and I upon the other.’

‘Alas! it seems so.’

Vellacott leant back in his chair again and crossed his legs.

‘In my turn,’ he said quietly, ‘I must remind you, monsieur, that I am a journalist.’

The Provincial raised his eyebrows almost imperceptibly and waited for his companion to continue. His silence and the momentary motion of his eyebrows, which in no way affected the lids, expressed admirably his failure to see the connection of his companion’s remark.

‘Which means,’ Christian went on to explain, ‘that my place is not upon either side of the question, but in the middle. I belong to no party, and I am the enemy of no man. I do not lead men’s opinions. It is my duty to state facts as plainly and as coldly as possible in order that my countrymen may form their own judgment. It may appear that at one time I write upon one side of the question ; the next week I may seem to

write upon the other. That is one of the misfortunes of my calling.'

'Then we are not necessarily enemies,' said the Jesuit softly

'No—not necessarily. On the other hand,' continued Christian, with daring deliberation, 'it is not at all necessary that we should be friends.'

The Jesuit smiled slightly—so slightly that it was the mere ghost of a smile, affecting the lines of his small mouth, but in no way relieving the soft darkness of his eyes.

'Then we are enemies,' he said. 'He Whose follower I am, said that all who are not with Him are against Him.'

The Englishman's lips closed suddenly, and a peculiar stony look came over his face. There was one subject upon which he had determined not to converse.

'I am instructed,' continued the Pro-

vincial, with a sudden change of manner from pleasant to practical, ‘to ask of you a written promise never to write one word either for or against the Society of Jesus again. In exchange for that promise I am empowered to tender to you the sincere apologies of the Society for the inconvenience to which you may have been put, and to assist you in every way to return home at once.’

A great silence followed this speech. A small clock suspended somewhere in the room ticked monotonously, otherwise there was no sound audible. The two men sat within a yard of each other, each thinking of the other in his individual way, from his individual point of view, the Jesuit with downcast eyes, his companion watching his immobile features.

At length Christian Vellacott’s full and quiet tones broke the spell.

‘Of course,’ he said simply, ‘I refuse.’

The Provincial rose from his seat, pushing it back as he did so.

‘Then I will not detain you any longer. You are no doubt fatigued. The lay-brother waiting outside will show you the—room assigned to you, and at whatever time of day or night you may wish to see me remember that I am at your service.’

Christian rose also. He appeared to hesitate, and then to grasp the table with both hands to assist himself. He stood for a moment, and suddenly tottered forward. Had not the Provincial caught him he would have fallen.

‘My head turns,’ he mumbled incoherently. ‘What is the matter? . . . what is the matter?’

The Jesuit slipped his arm round him—

a slight arm, but as hard and strong as steel.

‘ You are tired,’ he said, sympathetically ; ‘ perhaps you have a little touch of fever. Come, I will assist you to your room.’

And the two men passed out together.

## CHAPTER XXIII

## STRICKEN DOWN

In later days Christian Vellacott could bring back to his memory no distinct recollection of that first night spent in the monastery. There was an indefinite remembrance of the steady, monotonous clang of a bell in the first hours, doubtless the tolling of the matins, calling the elect to prayer at midnight.

After that he must have fallen into a deep lethargic sleep, for he never heard the distant strains of the organ and the melodious chanting of gruff voices. The strange, unquiet melody hovered over him in the little

cell, following him as he glided away from earth upon the blessed wings of sleep, and haunted his restless dreams.

The monks were early astir next morning, for the sweet smell of drying hay filled the air, and the second crop of the fruitful earth lay waiting to be stacked. With tucked-up gowns and bared arms the sturdy devotees worked with rake and pitchfork. No whispered word passed between them ; none raised his head to look around upon the smiling landscape or search in the cloudless sky for the tiny lark whose morning hymn rippled down to them. Each worked on in silence, tossing the scented hay, his mind being no doubt filled with thoughts above all earthly things.

Near at hand lay a carefully-kept vegetable garden of large dimensions. Here grew in profusion all nourishing roots and

herbs, but there was no sign of more luscious fruits. Small birds hopped and fluttered here and there unheeded and unmolested, calling to each other joyously, and the warming air was alive with the hum of tinier wings.

In the midst of this walked man—the lord of all—humbly, silently, with bowed head and unadmir ing eyes—man whose life was vouchsafed for the enjoyment of all these things.

A little square patch of sunlight lay on the stone floor of the small cell allotted to Christian Vellacott. The thick oak door deadened the sounds of life in the monastery, such as they were, and the strong, laboured breathing of the young Englishman alone broke the chill silence.

Christian lay, all dressed, on the narrow bed. His eyes were half closed, and the

ruddy brown of his cheeks had faded into an ashy grey. His clenched hands lay numbly at his side. Through his open, swollen lips meaningless words came in a hoarse whisper.

Presently the door opened with a creaking sound, but the sleeper moved no limb or feature. René Drucquer entered the cell and ran quickly to the bedside. Behind, with more dignity and deliberation, followed the sub-prior of the monastery. The young priest had obtained permission from his Provincial to see Christian Vellacott for a few moments before his hurried departure for India. Thus René had received his mission sooner than he had hoped for. The astute and far-seeing Provincial had from the beginning intended that René Drucquer should be removed from harm's way without delay.

once his disagreeable mission to St. Mary Western was performed.

'My father,' exclaimed the young priest in alarm, 'he is dying!'

The venerable sub-prior bent his head over the bed. He was a tall, spare man, with very sunken cheeks, and a marvellous expression of placid contentment in his eyes such as one never finds in the face of a young monk. He was very learned in medicines, and in the administration of such simple herbs as were required to remedy the illnesses within the monastery walls. Perhaps some of his patients died when they might have lived under more skilled treatment, but it is a short and easy step from life to death within a comfortless cell, and his bony hands were as tender over his sick brethren as those of a woman.

He felt the Englishman's pulse and

watched his ashen face for some moments, touching the clammy forehead softly, while René Drucquer stood by with a great sickening weight of remorse and fear upon his heart. Then the sub-prior knelt stiffly down, and placed his clean-shaven lips near to Christian's ear.

'My son,' he said, 'do you hear me?'

Christian breathed less heavily, as if he were listening to some far-off sound, but never moved a feature. Presently he began to murmur incoherently, and the sub-prior bent his ear to listen.

'Much good would a blessing of mine do you, Hilda,' observed Christian into the reverend ear. The old gentleman raised his cadaverous head and looked somewhat puzzled. Again he listened.

'Look after Aunt Judy—she cannot last long,' murmured the young Englishman in

his native tongue, which was unknown to the monk.

‘It is fever,’ said the sub-prior presently—‘one of those terrible fevers which kill men as the cold kills flies !’

No thought seemed to enter the monk’s mind of possible infection. He knelt upon the cold floor with one bare and bony arm beneath the sick man’s head, while the other lay across his breast. He was looking intently into the veiled eyes, inhaling the very breath of the swollen lips.

‘Will he die, my father?’ asked René Drucquer in a whisper ; his face was as pale as Vellacott’s.

‘He is in the hands of the good God,’ was the pious answer. The tall monk rose to his feet and stood before the bed thinking. He rubbed his bony hands together slowly. Through the tiny window a shaft of sunlight

poured down upon his grizzled head, and showed up relentlessly the deep furrows that ran diagonally down from his cheek-bone to his chin.

‘ You must watch here, my son,’ he continued, ‘ while I inform the Father-Provincial of this.’

The venerable sub-prior was no Jesuit, and perhaps he would have been just as well pleased had the Provincial elected to live elsewhere than in the monastery. But the Prior—an old man of ninety, and incapable of work or thought—was completely in the power of the Society.

When he found himself alone with the Englishman, René Drucquer sat wearily upon a small wooden bench, the only form of seat provided, and leant his narrow face upon his hands.

The prospect that he saw before him as

he sat staring vacantly at the floor of the little cell was black enough. He saw no possible outlet, and he had not the courage to force his way through the barriers erected all round him. It must be remembered that he was a Roman Catholic, and over a sincere disciple of the Mother Church the power of the Jesuits is greater than man should ever be allowed to exercise. The slavery that England fought against so restlessly is nothing to it, for mental bondage is infinitely heavier than physical service. He had determined to accept the Provincial's offer of missionary work in Asia, but the sudden horror of realising that he was a Jesuit, and could never be anything else than a Jesuit for the rest of his days, was fresh upon him. He was too young yet to find consolation in the thought that he at all events could attempt to steer a clear, unsullied course through

the shoals and quicksands that surround a priest's existence, and he was too old to buoy himself up with the false hope that he might, despite his Jesuit's oath, do some good work for his Church. His awakening had been rendered more terrible by the brilliancy of the dreams which it had interrupted.

He had not looked upon Christian Vellacott as a victim hitherto, for the bravest receive the least sympathy, and the young Englishman's cool way of treating his reverse of fortune had repelled pity or commiseration. But now all that was changed. Whatever this sickness might prove to be, René Drucquer felt that the blame of it lay at his own door. If Christian Vellacott were to die, he, René Drucquer, was in the eyes of God a murderer, for he had forcibly brought him to his death. This was an unpleasant reflection for a young devotee

whose inward soul was full of human kindness ; and the presence of the strong man who lay gasping for breath upon the narrow comfortless bed was not reassuring.

It was only natural that these thoughts, coupled with the realisation of the aimlessness of his own existence, should have bred in the young Jesuit's heart a dull fire of antagonism against the man who was in immediate authority over him, and when the Provincial noiselessly entered the cell a few minutes later, he felt a sudden thrill of misgiving at the thought that his feelings were sacred to none—that this man with his deep inscrutable eyes could read the face of his very soul like an open book.

In this, René Drucquer was right. The Provincial was fully aware of the presence of this spirit of antagonism, and, moreover, he knew that it extended to the taciturn

sub-prior who accompanied him. But this knowledge in no way disturbed him. The spirit of antagonism had met him in every turn of life. It was so familiar that he had learnt to despise it. Hitherto he had never failed in any undertaking, and he had never been turned aside from the execution of his purpose by the fear of incurring the enmity of men. Such minds as this make their mark in the line of life which they take up, and if they do not happen to win the love of their fellow-beings, they get on remarkably well without it.

The Provincial came into the cell with a singular noiselessness of motion. His pale face expressed neither surprise nor annoyance, and his eyes rested upon the form of the sick man with no sign of apprehension. He approached, and with his long white finger touched Christian's wrist. For a few

moments he watched the uneasy movements of his flushed face, and then he turned aside, without, however, leaving the bedside. Here again there seemed to be no fear or thought of infection.

The sub-prior stood behind him with clasped hands, while René, who had risen from his seat, was near at hand.

‘This man, my father,’ said the Provincial, coldly, ‘must not die. You must take every care, and spare no expense or trouble. If it is necessary you can have doctors from Nantes. I will bear every expense, and I shall be grieved to hear of his death !’

Then he turned to leave the cell. He was a busy man, and his visit had already lasted nearly three minutes.

René Drucquer stepped forward hurriedly. He was between his superior and the door,

so that he was in a position to command attention.

‘My father,’ he pleaded, ‘may I nurse him?’

The Provincial raised his eyebrows almost imperceptibly ; then he waved his hand, commanding the young priest to stand aside.

‘No,’ he said, softly, ‘you must leave for Nantes in half-an-hour,’ and he passed out into the noiseless corridor.

## CHAPTER XXIV

## BACK TO LIFE

ONE mellow autumnal evening, when the sunlight reflected from the white monastery walls upon the fruit-trees climbing there was still warm and full of ripening glow, the Provincial was taking his post-prandial promenade.

It is, perhaps, needless to observe that he was alone. No one ever walked with the Provincial. No footstep ever crushed the gravel in harmony with his gliding tread. Perhaps, indeed, no one had ever walked with him thus, in the twilight, since a fairy dancing form had moved in the shadow of

his tall person, and footsteps lighter than his own had vainly endeavoured to keep time with his longer limbs. But that was in no monastery garden ; and the useful, vegetable-producing enclosure bore little resemblance to the château terrace. In those days it may be that there was a gleam of life in the man's deep, velvety eyes—perhaps, indeed, a moustache adorned the short twisted lip where the white fingers rasped so frequently now.

The pious monks were busy with their evening meal, and the Provincial was quite alone in the garden. All around him the leaves glowed ruddily in the warm light. Everywhere the fruits of earth were ripe and full with mature beauty ; but the solitary walker noted none of these. He paced backwards and forwards with downcast eyes, turning slowly and indifferently as if it

mattered little where he walked. The merry blackbirds in the hay-field adjoining the garden called to each other continuously, and from a hidden rookery came the voices of the dusky settlers, which is, perhaps, the saddest sound in all nature's harmonies. But the Jesuit resolutely refused to listen. Once, however, he stopped and stood motionless for some seconds, with his head turned slightly to meet the distant cry; but he never raised his eyes, which were deep and lifeless in their gaze. It may be that there was a rookery near that southern château, where he once had walked in the solemn evening hour, or perhaps he did not hear that sound at all though his ear was turned towards it.

It would be hard indeed to read from the priest's still features the thoughts that might be passing through his powerful brain; but

the strange influence of his being was such as makes itself felt without any spoken word. As he walked there with his long hands clasped behind his back, his peculiarly-shaped head bent slightly forward, and his perfect lips closely pressed, no one could have looked at him without feeling instinctively that no ordinary mind was busy beneath the tiny tonsure—that no ordinary soul breathed there for weal or woe, seeking after higher things in the right way or the wrong. The man's cultivated repose of manner, his evident intellectuality, and his subtle strength of purpose visible in every glance of his eyes, betrayed that although his life might be passed in the calm retreat of a monastery, his soul was not there. The man was never created to pass his existence in prayerful meditation; his mission was one of strife and contention amidst the strong minds of the

age. One felt that he was living in this quiet Breton valley for a purpose ; that from this peaceful spot he was dexterously handling wires that caused puppets—aye, puppets with golden crowns—to dance, and smirk, and bow in the farthest corners of the earth.

Presently the Jesuit heard footsteps upon the gravel at the far side of the garden, but he did not raise his head. His interest in the trivial incidents of every-day life appeared to be quite dead.

‘ Softly, softly ! ’ said a deep rough voice, which the Provincial recognised as that of the sub-prior ; then he raised his eyes slightly and looked across the garden, without, however, altering his pace.

He saw there Christian Vellacott walking by the side of the hard-faced old monk with long hesitating strides, like a man who had

forgotten how to use his legs. It was exactly six weeks since the young journalist had passed through that garden with René Drucquer, and those weeks had been to him a strange and not unpleasant dream. It seemed as if the man lying upon that little bed was in no way connected with the wiry energetic Christian Vellacott of old. As he lay there semi-somnolent and lazily comfortable from sheer weakness, his interest in life was of a speculative description, as if he looked on things from afar off. Nothing seemed to matter much. There was an all-pervading sense of restful indifference as to whether it might be night or day, morning, noon or evening. All responsibility in existence seemed to have left him ; his ready pride of self-dependence had given way to a gentle obedience, and the passage from wakefulness to sleep was very sweet.

Through all those dreamy hours he heard the soft rustle of woollen garments and the suppressed shuffle of sandalled feet. Whenever he opened his heavy eyes he discerned vaguely in the dim light a grey still form seated upon the plain wooden bench at his bedside. Whenever he tried to change his position upon the hard bed and his weary bones refused their function, strong hard hands were slipped beneath him and kind assistance freely given. As a rule, it was the tall sub-prior who ministered to the sick man, fighting the dread fever with all his simple knowledge ; his hands smoothed oftenest the tossed pillow ; but many clean-shaven, strong, and weary faces were bowed over the bed during those six weeks, for there was a competition for the post of sick-nurse. The monks loved to feel that they were performing some tangible good, and not spending

their hours over make-believe tasks like a man-of-warsman in fine weather.

One frequent visitor, however, Christian Vellacott never saw beneath his lazy lashes. The Provincial never entered that little cell unless he was positively informed that its inmate was asleep. The inscrutable Jesuit seemed almost to be ashamed of the anxiety that he undoubtedly felt respecting the sick man thus thrown upon his hands by a peculiar chain of incidents. He spoke coldly and sarcastically to the sub-prior whenever he condescended to mention the subject at all; but no day passed in which he failed to pay at least one visit to the little cell at the end of the long silent corridor.

‘Softly, softly !’ said the old sub-prior, holding out his bony hand to stay his companion’s progress, ‘you are too ambitious, my son.’

Christian laughed in a low weak voice, and raised his head to look round him. The laugh ceased suddenly as he caught sight of the Provincial, and across the potato-bed the two strong men looked speculatively into each other's eyes in the peaceful twilight. The Jesuit's gaze fell first, and with a dignified bow he moved gently away.

'I am stronger than I look, my father,' said Christian, turning to his companion. Then they walked slowly on, and presently rested upon a wooden bench built against the monastery wall.

The young Englishman leant back and watched the Provincial, who was pacing backwards and forwards where they had first seen him. The old monk sat with clasped hands, and gravely contemplated the gravel beneath his feet. Thus they waited together within the high white-washed walls, while the

light faded from the western sky. Three types, as strangely-contrasted as the student of human kind could wish to see: the old monk with his placid bloodless face and strong useless arms—a wasted energy, a mere monument to mistaken zeal; and the younger men so widely severed by social circumstances, and yet resembling each other somewhat in heart and soul. Each had a strong individuality—each a great and far-reaching vitality. Each was, in his way, a power in the world, as all strong minds are; for in face of what may be said (and with apparent justice) respecting chance and mere good fortune, good men must come to the top among their fellows. They must—and most assuredly they do. As in olden days the doughtiest knights sought each other in the battle-field to measure steel, so in these later times the ruling intellects of the day meet

and clear a circle round them. The Provincial was a power in the Society of Jesus ; perhaps he was destined one day to be General of it ; and Christian Vellacott had suddenly appeared upon the field of politic strife, heralding his arrival with two most deadly blows dealt in masterly succession. From the first they were sure to come together, sooner or later ; and now, when they were separated by nothing more formidable than a bed of potatoes, they were glancing askance and longing to be *at* each other. But it could not be. Had the sub-prior left the garden it would have made no difference. It was morally impossible that those two men could speak what they were thinking, for one of them was a Jesuit.

The Provincial, however, made the first move, and the Englishman often wondered in later days what his intention might have been.

He walked on to the northern end of the garden, where a few thick-stemmed pear trees were trained against the wall. The fruit was hanging in profusion, for it was not consumed in the monastery but given to the poor at harvest-time. The Provincial selected a brown ripe pear, and broke it delicately from the tree without allowing his fingers to come in contact with the fruit itself. Then he turned and walked with the same lazy precision towards the two other occupants of the garden. At his approach the sub-prior rose from his seat and stood motionless with clasped hands; there was a faint suggestion of antagonism in his attitude, which was quite devoid of servility. Christian, however, remained seated, raising his keen grey eyes to the Provincial's face with a quiet self-assertion which the Jesuit ignored.

‘I am glad, monsieur, to see you restored

to health,' he said coldly to Christian, meeting his gaze for a moment.

The Englishman bowed very slightly, and there was a peculiar expressiveness in the action which betrayed his foreign education, but the cool silence with which he waited for the Provincial to speak again was essentially British. The Jesuit moved and glanced slowly beneath his lowered eyelids towards the motionless figure of the sub-prior. He was too highly bred to allow himself to be betrayed into any sign of embarrassment, and too clever to let the Englishman see that he was hesitating. After a momentary pause he turned gravely to the sub-prior, and said :

‘ Will you allow your patient, my brother, to taste of our fruit? it is ripe and wholesome.’

Then, without awaiting a reply, he pre-

sented the pear to Vellacott. It was a strange action, and no doubt there was some deep intention in it. The Jesuit must have known, however, from René Drucquer's report, and from his own observations, that Christian Vellacott was of too firm a mould to allow his feelings to be influenced by a petty action of this description, however sincere and conciliatory might have been the spirit in which it was conceived. Perhaps he read the Englishman's character totally wrong, although his experience of men must have been very great; or perhaps he really wished to conciliate him, and took this first step with the graceful delicacy of his nation, with a view to following it up.

With a conventional word of thanks, Vellacott took the pear and set it down upon the bench at his side. Whatever the Jesuit's

intention might have been, it was frustrated by his quiet action. It would have been so easy to have said a few words of praise regarding the fruit, and it was only natural to have begun eating it at once; but Vellacott read a deeper meaning in all this, and he chose a more difficult course. It was assuredly harder to keep silence than to talk, and a weaker-minded man would have thanked the Provincial with effusion. The manner in which Vellacott laid the fruit upon the bench, his quiet and deliberate silence, conveyed unmistakably and intentionally that the Provincial's society was as unwelcome as it was unnecessary. There was nothing to be done but take the hint; and in the lowering twilight the solitary, miserable man moved reluctantly away. With contemplative hardness of heart the Englishman watched him go; there was no feeling of triumph in his

soul—neither, however, was there pity. The Jesuit had chosen his own path, he had reached his goal, and that most terrible thirst—the thirst for power—was nearly slaked. If at times—at the end of a long day of hard mental work, when men's hearts are softened by weariness and lowering peace—he desired something else than power, some little touch of human sympathy perhaps, his was the blame if no heart responded to his own. Christian Vellacott sat and wondered dreamily, with the nonchalance of a man who has been at the very gates of death, if power were worth this purchase-money.

The sub-prior had seated himself again, and with his strong hands meekly clasped he waited. He knew that something was passing which he could not understand ; his dull instincts told him vaguely that between these two strong men there was warfare, dumb,

sullen, and merciless ; but unused as he was to the ways of men, unlearned in the intricacies of human thoughts, he could not read more.

‘ You have not told me yet, my father,’ said Vellacott, ‘ how long I have been ill.’

‘ Six weeks, my son,’ replied the taciturn monk.

‘ And it was very bad ? ’

‘ Yes, very bad.’

Christian slowly rubbed his thin hands together. His fingers were moist and singularly white, with a bleached appearance about the knuckles. His face was thin, but not emaciated, his long jaw and somewhat pronounced chin were not more bony than of old, but the expression of his mouth was quite changed ; his lips were no longer thrust upward with a determined curve, and a smile seemed nearer at hand.

‘I have a faint recollection of being very tenderly nursed and cared for; generally by you, I think. No doubt you saved my life.’

The sub-prior moved a little, and drew in his feet.

‘The matter was not in my hands,’ he said, quietly.

The Englishman, with some tact, allowed this remark to pass in acquiescent silence.

‘Did you ever think that . . . I was not . . . going back to England?’ he asked presently, in a lighter tone, though the thought of returning home brought no smile to his face.

The sub-prior did not reply at once. He appeared to be thinking deeply, for he leant forward in an unmonastic attitude with his knees apart, his elbows resting upon them, and his hands clasped. He gazed across the

prosaic potato-bed with his colourless lips slightly apart.

‘One night,’ he began meditatively, ‘I went to sit with you after the bell for matins had been rung. From midnight till three o’clock you never moved. Then I gave you some cordial, and as I stooped over you the candle flickered a little; there were strange shadows upon your face, but around your lips there was a deeper shade. I had seen it once before, on my brother’s face when he lay upon the hard Paris pavement with a bullet in his lungs, and his breath whistling through the orifice as the winds whistle round our walls in winter. I held the candle closer to your face, and as I did so, a hand came over my shoulder and took it from my fingers. The Father-Provincial had come to help me. He said no word, but set the candle down upon the bed,

and I held you up while he administered the cordial drop by drop, as a man oils a cart-wheel.'

'Ah!' said Christian slowly and suggestively, '*he* was there!'

The monk made no reply. He sat motionless, with a calm, acquired silence, which might have meant much or nothing.

'Did he come often?' inquired the Englishman.

'Very often.'

'I never saw him.'

This, again, was met with silence. Presently the sub-prior continued his narrative.

'When daylight came at last,' he said, 'the shadow had left your lips. I think that night was the worst; it was then that you were nearer . . . nearer than at any other time.'

Christian Vellacott was strong enough

now to take his usual interest in outward things. With the writer's instinct he went through the world looking round him, always studying men and things, watching, listening, and storing up experience. The Provincial interested him greatly, but he did not dare to show his curiosity ; he hesitated to penetrate the darkness that surrounded the man's life, past, present, and future. In a minor degree the taciturn sub-prior arrested his attention. The old monk was in a communicative humour, and the Englishman led him on a little without thinking much about the fairness of it.

' Did your brother die ? ' he asked, sympathetically.

' He died,' was the reply. ' Yes, my son, he died—died cursing the tyrant's bullet in his lungs. He threw away his life in a vain

attempt to alter human nature, to set straight that which is crooked and cannot be set straight. He sought to bring about at once that which cometh not until the lion shall eat straw like an ox. See, my son, that you do not attempt the same.'

'I think,' said Christian, after a pause, 'that we all try a little, and perhaps some day a great accumulation of little efforts will take place. You, my father, have tried as well!'

The monk slowly shook his head, without, however, any great display of conviction.

'I was not always a monk,' he said, as if seeking to excuse a bygone folly.

It was nearly dark now. The birds were silent, and only the whispering of the crisp, withering leaves broke the solemn hush of eventide. The two men sat side by side without speaking. They had learnt to

know each other fairly well during the last weeks—so well that between them silence was entirely restful. At length Christian moved restlessly. He had reached that stage of convalescence where a position becomes irksome after a short time. It was merely a sign of returning strength.

‘Where is the Abbé Drucquer,’ he asked abruptly.

‘He left us some time ago,’ was the guarded reply.

‘He spoke of going abroad,’ said Christian, deliberately ignoring the sub-prior’s tone.

‘The Father Provincial told me that the Abbé has gone abroad—to India—to spread there the Holy Light to such as are still in darkness.’

The young journalist thought that he

detected again a faint suggestion of antagonism in the sub-prior's voice. The manner in which the information was imparted was almost an insult to the Provincial. It was a repetition of his words, given in such a manner that had the speaker been a man of subtle tongue it would have implied grave doubt.

Christian was somewhat surprised that René Drucquer should have attained his object so quickly. He never suspected that he himself might have had much to do with it, that it had been deemed expedient to remove the young priest beyond the possible reach of his influence, because he was quite unconscious of this influence. He did not know that its power had affected René Drucquer, and that some reflection of it had even touched the self-contained Pro-

vincial—that it was even now making this old sub-prior talk more openly than was prudent or wise. He happened to be taking the question from a very different point of view.

## CHAPTER XXV

## BACK TO WORK

DAY by day Christian Vellacott recovered strength. The enforced rest, and perhaps also the monastic peacefulness of his surroundings, contributed greatly towards this. In mental matters as in physical we are subject to contagion, and from the placid recluses, vegetating unheeded in the heart of Brittany, their prisoner acquired a certain restfulness of mind which was eminently beneficial to his body. Life inside those white walls was so sleepy and withal so pleasant that it was physically and mentally impossible to think

and worry over events that might be passing in the outer world.

Presently, however, Christian began to feel idle, which is a good sign in invalids; and soon the days became long and irksome. He began to take an increased interest in his surroundings, and realised at once how little he knew of the existence going on about him. Though he frequently passed, in the dim corridors and cloisters, a silent grey-clad figure, exchanging perhaps with him a scarcely perceptible salutation, he had never spoken with any other inmates of the monastery than the Provincial and the sub-prior.

He noticed also that the watchful care of the nurse had imperceptibly glided into that of a warder. He was never allowed out of his cell unless accompanied by the sub-prior —in fact, he was a state prisoner. His daily walks never extended beyond the one path

near the potato bed, or backwards and forwards at the sunny end of the garden, where the huge pears hung ripely. From neither point was any portion of the surrounding country visible, but the Provincial could not veil the sun, and Christian knew where lay the West and where the East.

No possible opportunity for escape presented itself, but the Englishman was storing up strength and knowledge all the while. He knew that things would not go on for long like this, and felt that the Provincial would sooner or later summon him to the long room at the end of the corridor upon the upper floor.

This call came to him three weeks after the day when the two men had met in the garden—nine weeks after the Englishman's captivity had commenced.

‘My son,’ said the sub-prior one after-

noon, ‘the Father Provincial wishes to speak with you to-day at three.’

Christian glanced up at the great monastery clock, which declared the time to be a quarter to three.

‘I am ready,’ he said quietly. There was no tremor in his voice or light in his eyes, and he continued walking leisurely by the side of the old monk ; but a sudden thrill of pleasant anticipation warmed his heart.

A little later they entered the monastery and mounted the stone stairs together. As they walked along the corridor the clock in the tower overhead struck three.

‘I will wait for you at the foot of the stairs,’ said the monk slowly, as if with some compunction. Then he led the way to the end of the corridor and knocked at the door. He stood back, as if the Provincial were in the habit of keeping knockers waiting. Such

was, at all events, the case now, and some minutes elapsed before a clear low voice bade him enter.

The monk opened the door and stood back against the wall for Christian to pass in. The Provincial was seated at the table near the window, which was open, the afternoon being sultry although the autumn was nearly over. At his left hand stood the small Venetian mirror which enabled him to see who was behind him without turning round.

As Christian crossed the room the Provincial rose and bowed slightly, with one of his slow soft glances. Then he indicated the chair at the left-hand side of the table, and said, without looking up :

‘Be good enough—— Mr. Vellacott.’

When they were both seated the Provincial suddenly raised his eyes and fixed

them upon the Englishman's face. The action was slightly dramatic, but very effective, and clearly showed that he was accustomed to find the eyes of others quail before his. Christian met the gaze with a calmness more difficult to meet than open defiance. After a moment they turned away simultaneously.

'I need scarcely,' said the Provincial, with singular sweetness of manner, which, however, was quite devoid of servility, 'apologise to you, Monsieur, for speaking in French, as it is almost your native language.'

Christian bowed, at the same time edging somewhat nearer to the table.

'There are one or two matters,' continued the Jesuit, speaking faster, 'upon which I have been instructed to treat with you; but first I must congratulate you upon your restoration to health. Your illness has been

very serious . . . I trust that you have had nothing to complain of . . . in the treatment which you have received at our hands.'

Christian, while sitting quite motionless, was making an exhaustive survey of the room.

'On the contrary,' he said, in a conventional tone which, in comparison to his companion's manner, was almost brutal, 'it is probably owing to the care of the sub-prior that I am alive at the present moment, and—'

He stopped suddenly; an almost imperceptible motion of the Jesuit's straight eyebrows warned him.

'And . . . ?' repeated the Provincial, interrogatively. He leant back in his chair with an obvious air of interest.

'And I am very grateful——to him.'

'The reverend father is a great doctor,'

said the Jesuit lightly. ‘Excuse me,’ he continued, rising and leaning across the table, ‘I will close the window; the air from the river begins to grow cool.’

The journalist moved slightly, looking over his shoulder towards the window; at the same moment he altered, with his elbow, the position of the small mirror standing upon the table. Instead of reflecting the whole room, including the door at the end, it now reproduced the blank wall at the side opposed to the curtained recess where the bed was placed.

‘And now, Mr. Vellacott,’ continued the Jesuit, reseating himself, ‘I must beg your attention. I think there can be no harm in a little mutual frankness, and—and it seems to me that a certain allowance for respective circumstances can well be demanded.’

He paused, and, opening the leather-

bound manuscript book, became absorbed for a moment in the perusal of one of its pages.

‘From your pen,’ he then said, in a business-like monotone, ‘there has emanated a serious and hitherto unproved charge against the Holy Society of Jesus. It came at a critical moment in the political strife then raging in France ; and, in proportion to the attention it attracted, harm and calumny accrued to the Society. I am told that your motives were purely patriotic, and your desire was nothing beyond a most laudable one of keeping your countrymen out of difficulties. Before I had the pleasure of seeing you I said, “This is a young journalist who, at any expense, and even at the sacrifice of truth, wishes to make a name in the world and force himself into public attention.” Since then I have withdrawn that opinion.’

During these remarks the Provincial had

not raised his eyes from the table. He now leant back in the chair and contemplated his own clasped hands. Christian had listened attentively. His long grave face was turned slightly towards the Provincial, and his eyes were perhaps a little softer in their gaze.

‘I endeavoured,’ he said, ‘some weeks ago, to explain my position.’

The Jesuit inclined his head. Then he raised his long white finger to his upper lip, stroking the blue skin pensively.

Presently he raised his eyes to the Englishman’s face, and in their velvety depths Christian thought he detected an expression which was almost pleading. It seemed to express a desire for help, for some slight assistance in the performance of a difficult task. He never again looked into those eyes in all his life, but the remembrance of them remained in his heart for many years after

the surrounding incidents had passed away from memory and interest. He knew that the Soul looking forth from that pale and heartless face was of no ordinary mould or strength. In later years when they were both grey-haired men whose Yea or No was of some weight in the world—one speaking with the great and open voice of the Press, the other working subtly, dumbly, secretly—their motives may have clashed once more, their souls may have met and touched, as it were, over the heads of the People, but they never looked into each other's eyes again.

The Provincial moved uneasily.

‘ It has been a most unfortunate business,’ he said gently, and after a pause continued more rapidly, with his eyes upon the book. ‘ I am instructed to lay before you the apologies of the Society for the inconvenience to which you have been put. Your own sense

of justice will tell you that we were bound to defend ourselves in every way. You have done us a great injury, and, as is our custom, we have contradicted nothing. The Society of Jesus does not defend itself in the vain hope of receiving justice at the hands of men. I am now in a position to inform you again that you are at liberty—free to go where you will, when you will—and that any sum you may require is at your disposal to convey you home to England . . . on your signing a promise never to write another word for private or public circulation on the subject of the Holy Order of Jesus, or to dictate to the writing of another.'

'I must refuse,' said Christian laconically, almost before the words had left the Jesuit's lips. 'As I explained before, I am simply a public servant; what I happen to know must ever be at the public disposal or I am useless.'

A short silence followed this remark. When at length the Provincial spoke his tone was cold and reserved.

‘Of course,’ he said, ‘I expected a refusal —at first. I am instructed to ask you to reconsider your refusal and to oblige me, at the end of a week, with the result of your meditations. If it remains a refusal, another week will be accorded, and so on.’

‘Until——?’

The Jesuit closed the book upon the table in front of him and with great care altered its position so that it lay quite squarely. He raised his eyebrows slightly and glanced sideways towards the Englishman. At that moment the bell began summoning the devotees to their evening meal, its deep tone vibrating weirdly through the bare corridors.

‘Until you accept,’ suggested he softly.

Christian looked at him speculatively.

The faintest suspicion of a smile hovered for a moment in his eyes, and then he turned and looked out of the window.

‘I hope, Monsieur,’ continued the Jesuit, ‘that when I have the pleasure of seeing you—a week hence—your health will be quite re-established !’

‘Thank you !’

‘And in the meantime I shall feel honoured by your asking for anything you may require.’

‘Thank you !’ answered Christian again. He was still looking over his shoulder, down at the brown river which ran immediately below the window.

‘Please excuse my rising to open the door for you,’ said the Provincial with cool audacity, ‘but I have a few words to write before joining our brethren at their evening repast.’

Christian turned and looked at him vaguely. There was a peculiar gleam in his eyes, and he was breathing heavily. Then he rose and, as he passed the Jesuit, bowed slightly in acknowledgment of his grave salutation. He walked quickly down the length of the room, which was not carpeted, and opened the door, closing it again with some noise immediately. But he never crossed the threshold. To the man sitting at the table it was as if the Englishman had left the room closing the door after him.

Presently the Provincial glanced at the mirror, from mere habit, and found that it was displaced. He re-arranged it thoughtfully, so that the entire room was included in its field of reflection.

‘I wonder,’ he said aloud, ‘when and why he did that! ’

Then he returned to his writing. In a

few minutes, however, he rose and pushed back his chair. With his hands clasped behind his back he stood and gazed fixedly out of the window. Beneath him the brown water glided past with curling eddy and gleaming ripple, while its soft murmur was the only sound that broke the pathetic silence surrounding this lonely man. His small and perfectly-formed face was quite expressionless ; the curve of his thin lips meant nothing ; all the suppressed vitality of his being lay in those deep soft eyes over which there seemed to be a veil. Presently he turned, and with lithe, smooth steps passed down the long room and out of the door.

Instantly Christian Vellacott came from his hiding-place within the recess. He ran to the window and opened it noiselessly. A moment later he was standing upon the stone sill. The afternoon sun shone full upon his

face, as he stood there and showed a deep red flush on either cheek. Slowly he stooped forward, holding with one hand to the wood-work of the window while he examined critically the surface of the water. Suddenly he threw his arms forward and like a black shadow dived noiselessly, passing into the depth without a splash. When he rose to the surface he turned to look at the monastery. The Provincial's window was the only outlet directly on to the river.

The stream was rapid, and after swimming with it for a short time he left the water and lay down to recover his breath under the friendly cover of some bushes. There he remained for some time, while the short October twilight closed over the land. A man just dragged from the jaws of death, he lay in his wet clothes where he first found shelter without even troubling to

move his limbs from the pools of water slowly accumulating. Already the monastery was a thing of the past. With the rapid forethought of his generation he was already looking to the future. He knew too well the spirit of the people in France to fear pursuit. The monks never ventured beyond their own walls except on ostentatious missions of charity. The machinations of the Society of Jesus were less to be feared in France than in England, and he had only to take his story to the nearest sub-prefecture to raise a storm of popular opinion in his favour. But this was not his project. With him, as in all human plans, his own personal feelings came before the possible duty he owed to the public. He lay beneath the bramble undergrowth, and speculated as to what might have taken place subsequent to his disappearance. At that

moment the fortunes of the ‘Beacon’ gave him no food for thought. What Mr. Bodery and his subordinate might, or might not, think found no interest in his mind. All his speculations were confined to events at St. Mary Western, and the outcome of his meditations was that when the friendly cover of darkness lay on the land he rose and started to walk briskly across the well-tilled country towards the North.

That portion of Brittany which lies along the Northern coast is a pastoral land where sleep occupies the larger half of man’s life. Although it was only evening, an hour when Paris and London recover, as it were, from the previous night’s vigil and brighten up into vigour, the solitary Englishman passed unheeded through the squalid villages, unmolested along the winding roads. Mile after mile of scanty forest land and rich

meadow were left behind, while, except for a few heavily-breathing cattle, he met no sign of life. At last he came upon a broader road which bore unmistakeable signs of military workmanship in its construction, and here he met, and passed with laconic greeting, a few peasant women returning with empty baskets from some neighbouring market ; or perhaps a ‘cantonnier’ here and there, plodding home with ‘sabots’ swinging heavily and round shoulders bent beneath the burden of his weighty stone-breaking implements.

Following the direction of this road his course was now towards the North-East, with more tendency to the Eastward than he desired, but there was no choice. About eight o’clock he passed through a small village, which appeared to be already wrapped in stupid slumber such as attends the

peasant's pillow. A cock crowed loudly, and in reply a dog barked with some alarm, but Christian was already beyond the village upon the deserted high road again.

He now began to feel the weakening effect of his illness ; his legs became cramped, and he frequently rested at the roadside. The highway was running still more to the Eastward now, and Christian was just beginning to consider the advisability of taking to the country again, when it joined a broader road cut East and West. Here he stopped short, and, raising his head, stood quite still for some moments.

‘ Ah ! ’ he muttered. ‘ The sea. I smell the sea.’

He now turned to the left, and advanced along the newly-discovered road towards the West. As he progressed the pungent odour of seaweed refreshed him and grew stronger

every moment. Suddenly he became aware that although high land lay upon his left hand there was to his right a hollow darkness without shadow or depth. No merry splash of waves came to explain this ; the smell of the sea was there, but the joyous tumble of its waters was not to be heard. The traveller stooped low and peered into the darkness. Gradually he discerned a distant line of horizon, and to that point there seemed to stretch a vast dead sheet of water without light or motion. Upon his ears there stole a soft bubbling sound, varied occasionally by a tiny ripple. Suddenly a flash of recollection appeared to pass through the watcher's mind, and he muttered an exclamation of surprise as he turned towards the East and endeavoured to pierce the gloom. He was right. Upon the distant line of horizon a jagged outline cut the sky. It

was like the form of a huge tooth jutting out from the softer earth. Such is Mont St. Michel standing grandly alone in the midst of a shallow sullen sea. The only firm thing among the quaking sands, the only stone for miles around.

‘The Bay of Cancale !’ reflected Christian.  
‘If I keep to the Westward I shall reach St. Mâlo before ten o’clock !’

And he set off with renewed vigour. From his feet there stretched away to the North a great dead level of quicksand, seething, bubbling and heaving in the darkness. The sea, and yet no sea. Neither honest land nor rolling water.

## CHAPTER XXVI

## SIGNOR BRUNO

SILAS LEBRUN, captain and part-owner of the brig *Agnes and Mary* of Jersey, was an early riser. Moreover, the old gentleman entertained peculiar views as to the homage due to Morpheus. He made no elaborate toilet before entering the presence of that most loveable god. Indeed he always slept in his boots, and the cabin-boy had on several occasions invited the forecastle hands to believe that he neither removed the ancient sealskin cap from his head nor the wooden pipe from his lips when slumber soothed his

senses; but this statement was always set aside as unauthenticated.

In person the ancient sailor was almost square, with short legs and a body worthy of promotion to something higher. His face was wrinkled and brown, like the exterior of that incomprehensible fruit the medlar, which is never ripe till it is bad, and then it is to be avoided. A yellow-grey beard clustered closely round a short chin, and when perchance the sealskin cap was absent yellow-grey hair of a similar hue completed the circle, standing up as high from his brow as fell the beard downward from his chin. A pair of intensely blue eyes, liquid always with the milk of human kindness, rendered the hirsute medlar a pleasant thing to look at.

The *Agnes and Mary* was ready for sea, her cargo of potatoes, with a little light weight in the way of French beans and eggs,

comfortably stowed, and as Captain Lebrun emerged from what he was pleased to call his 'state-room' with the first breath of a clear morning he performed his matutinal toilet with a certain sense of satisfaction. This operation was simple, consisting merely in the passage of four very brown fingers through the yellow-grey hair, and a hurried dispersal of the tobacco ash secreted in his beard.

The first object that met the mariner's astonished gaze was the long black form of a man stretched comfortably upon the cabin locker. The green mud adhering to the sleeper's thin shoes showed that he had climbed on board at low tide when the harbour was dry.

Captain Lebrun gazed meditatively at the intruder for some moments. Then he produced a powerfully-scented pipe of venerable

appearance, which had been, at various stages of its existence, bound in a seamanlike manner with pieces of tarred yarn. He slowly filled this object, and proceeded to inform it in a husky voice that he was ‘blowed.’ The pipe was, apparently, in a similar condition, as it refused absolutely to answer to the powerful suction applied to it.

He then seated himself with some difficulty upon the corner of the low table, and examined the sleeper critically.

‘Poor devil,’ he again said, addressing himself to his pipe. ‘He’s one of them priest fellows.—Hi, mister !’ he observed, raising his voice.

Christian Vellacott woke up at once, and took in the situation without delay. He was not of those who must go through terrible contortions before regaining their senses after sleep.

‘Good morning, Captain !’ he observed, pleasantly.

‘Oh—yourn’t a parlee voo, then !’

‘No, I’m an Englishman.’

‘Indeed. Then you’ll excuse me, but what in the name of glory are you doing here ?’

Christian sat up, and looked at his muddy shoes with some interest.

‘Well, the truth is that I am bolting. I want to get across to England. I saw where you hailed from by your rig, and clambered on board last night. It seemed to me that when an Englishman is in a hole he cannot do better than go to a fellow-countryman for help.’

Captain Lebrun made a mighty effort to force a passage through his pipe, and was rewarded by a very high-pitched squeak.

‘Ay !’ he said, doubtfully. ‘But what sort of hole is it ? Nothing dirty, I’m hopin’.

Who are yer? Why are ye running away,  
and who are ye runnin' from?'

Though a trifle blunt the sailor's manner  
was not unfriendly, and Christian laughed  
before replying.

'Well,' he said, 'to tell you the whole  
story would take a long time. You remember  
perhaps there was a row, about two months  
ago, respecting some English rifles found in  
Paris?'

'Of course I remember that; we had  
a lot o' trouble with the Customs just then.  
The thing was ferreted out by a young news-  
paper fellow!'

Christian rubbed his hands slowly to-  
gether. He was terribly anxious to hear the  
sequel.

'I am that newspaper fellow,' he said,  
with a quick smile.

Captain Lebrun slowly stood up. He

contemplated his pipe thoughtfully, then laying it upon the table he turned solemnly towards Christian, and held out a broad brown hand which was covered with scales in lieu of skin.

‘ Shake hands, mister ? ’ he said.

Christian obliged him.

‘ And now,’ he said quickly, ‘ I want to know what has happened since—since I left England. Has there been a great row ? Has . . . has anybody wondered where I was ? ’

The old sailor may have had his suspicions. He may have guessed that Christian Vellacott had not left England at the dictates of his own free will, for he looked at him very kindly with his liquid blue eyes, and replied slowly :—

‘ I couldn’t say that *nobody* hasn’t been

wonderin' where ye was, but—but there's been nothing in the papers!'

'That is all right! And now will you give me a passage, Captain?'

'Course I will! We sail about eleven this morning. I'm loaded and cleared out. But I should like you to have a change o' clothes. Can't bear to see ye in them black things. It makes me feel as if I was talkin' to a priest.'

'I should like nothing better,' replied Christian, as he rose and contemplated his own person reflectively.

'Come into my state-room then. I've got a few things of my own, and a bit of a slop-chest ; jerseys and things as I sell to the men.'

The Captain's wardrobe was of a marine character and somewhat rough in texture.

He had, however, a coat and waistcoat of thick blue pilot-cloth which fitted Christian remarkably well, but the continuations thereof were so absurdly out of keeping with the young fellow's long limbs as to precipitate the skipper on to the verge of apoplexy. When he recovered, and his pipe was re-lighted, he left the cabin and went forward to borrow a pair of the required articles from Tom Slake, an ordinary seaman of tall and slim proportions. In a short time Christian Vellacott bore the outward semblance of a very fair specimen of the British tar, except that his cheeks were bleached and sunken, which discrepancy was promptly commented upon by the blunt old sailor.

Secrecy was absolutely necessary, so Tom, of the long legs, was the only person to whom Christian's presence was made known ; and he it was who (in view of a possible

berth as steward later on) was entrusted with the simple culinary duties of the vessel.

Breakfast, as served up by Tom, was of a noble simplicity. A long shiny loaf of yesterday's bread, some butter in a saucer—which vessel was deemed entirely superfluous in connection with cups—brown sugar in an old mustard-tin, with portions of yellow paper adhering to it, and solid slices of bacon brought from the galley in their native frying-pan. Such slight drawbacks, however, as there might have been in the matter of table-ware disappeared before the sense of kindly hospitality with which Captain Lebrun poured the tea into a cracked cup and a borrowed pannikin, dropping in the sugar with careful judgment from his brown fingers. Such defects as there might have lurked in the culinary art as carried on in the galley vanished before the friendly solicitude

with which Tom tilted the frying-pan to pour into Christian's plate a bright flow of bacon-fat cunningly mingled with cinders.

When the meal had been duly despatched Captain Lebrun produced his pipe and proceeded to fill it, after having extracted from its inward parts the usual high-toned squeak.

Christian leant back against the bulkhead with his hands buried deeply in Tom's borrowed pockets. He felt much more at home in pilot cloth than in cashmere.

'There is one more thing I should like to borrow,' he said.

'Ay?' repeated the captain interrogatively, as he searched in his waistcoat-pocket for a match. 'Ay, what is it?'

'A pipe. I have not had a smoke for two months.'

The Captain struck a light upon his leg.

'I've got one somewhere,' he replied, reassuringly; 'carried it for many years now, just in case this one fell overboard or got broke.'

Tom, who happened to be present, smiled audibly behind a hand which was hardly a recommendation for the coveted berth of steward, but Christian looked at the battered pipe with sympathetic gravity.

At ten o'clock the *Agnes and Mary* warped out of harbour and dropped lazily down the Rance, setting sail as she went. Christian had spent most of the morning in the little cabin smoking Captain Lebrun's reserve pipe, and seeking to establish order among the accounts of the ship. The accounts were the *bête noire* of the old sailor's existence. Upon his own confession he 'wasn't no arithmetician,' and Christian

found, upon inspecting his accounts, no cause to contradict this ambiguous statement.

When the *Agnes and Mary* was clear of the harbour he went on deck, where activity and maritime language reigned supreme. The channel was narrow and the wind light, consequently the little brig drifted more or less at her own sweet will. This would have been well enough had the waterway been clear of other vessels, but the Jersey steamer was coming in, with her yellow funnel gleaming in the sunlight, her mail-flag fluttering at her foremast, and her captain swearing on the bridge, with the whistle-pull in his hand.

Seeing that the *Agnes and Mary* had no steerage way, the captain stopped his engines for a few minutes, and then went ahead again at half-speed. This brought the vessels close together, and, as is the invariable custom in such circumstances, the two crews

stared stonily at each other. On the deck were one or two passengers enjoying the morning air after a cramped and uncomfortable night. Among these was an old man with a singularly benign expression ; he was standing near the after-wheel, gazing with senile placidity towards St. Mâlo. As the vessels neared each other, however, he walked towards the rail, and stood there with a pleasant smile upon his face, as if ready to exchange a greeting with any kindred soul upon the *Agnes and Mary*.

Christian Vellacott, seated upon the rail of the after-deck, saw the old man and watched him with some interest—not, however, altering his position or changing countenance. The vessels moved slowly on and, in due course, the two men were opposite to each other, each at the extreme stern of his ship.

Then the young journalist removed Captain Lebrun's spare pipe from his lips, and leaning sideways over the water, called out :

'Good morning, Signor Bruno !'

The effect of this friendly greeting upon the benevolent old gentleman was peculiar. He grasped the rail before him with both hands, and stared at the young Englishman. Then he stamped upon the deck with a sudden access of fury.

'Ah !' he exclaimed, fiercely, while a tiger-like gleam shone out from beneath his smooth white brows. 'Ah ! it is you !'

Christian swung his legs idly, and smiled with some amusement across the little strip of water.

Suddenly the old man plunged his hand into the breast-pocket of his coat. He appeared to be tugging wildly at some article which was caught in the lining of

his clothes, when a remarkable change came over his face. A dull red colour flew to his cheeks, and his eyes gleamed ruddily, as if shot with blood. Then without a word he fell forward with his breast against the painted rail, remained there a second, and as the two ships passed away from each other, rolled over upon his back on the clean deck, grasping a pistol in his right hand.

Christian Vellacott sat still upon the rail, swinging one leg, and smiling reflectively. He saw the old man fall and the other passengers crowd round him, but the *Agnes and Mary* had now caught the breeze and was moving rapidly out to sea, where the sunlight danced upon the water in little golden bars.

‘Apperlexy!’ said a voice in the journalist’s ear. He turned and found Cap-

tain Lebrun standing at his side looking after the steamer. ‘Apperlexy !’

‘Do you think so?’ asked Christian.

‘I do,’ was the reply given with some conviction. ‘I seen a man fall just like that; he was a broad-built man wi’ a thick neck, and in a moment of excitement he fell just like that, and died a’most at once. Apperlexy they said it was.’

‘It seemed to come over him very suddenly, did it not?’ said Christian, absently.

‘Ay, it did,’ said the captain. ‘Ye seemed to know him !’

Christian turned and looked at his companion full in the face. ‘I have met him twice,’ he said quietly. ‘He was in Eng land for some years, I believe; a political refugee, he called himself.’

By sea and land Captain Lebrun had learnt to devote an exclusive attention to

his own affairs, allowing other men to manage theirs, well or ill, according to their fancy. He knew that Christian Vellacott wished to tell him no more, and he was content that it should be so, but he had noticed a circumstance which, from the young journalist's position, was probably invisible. He turned to give an order to the man at the wheel, and then walked slowly and with some difficulty (for Captain Lebrun suffered, in a quiet way, agonies from rheumatism) back towards his passenger.

‘Seemed to me,’ he said reflectively, as he looked upwards to see if the foretopsail was shivering, ‘as if he had something in his hand when a’ fell.’

Christian followed the Captain’s gaze. The sails were now filling well, and there was an exhilarating sound of straining

cordage in the air while the vessel glided on. The young journalist was not an impressionable man, but he felt all these things. The sense of open freedom, the gentle rise and fall of the vessel, the whirring breeze, and the distant line of high land up the Rance towards Dinant—all these were surely worth hearing, feeling, and seeing; assuredly, they added to the joy of living.

‘Something in his hand,’ he repeated gravely; ‘what was it?’

Captain Lebrun turned sideways towards the steersman, and made a little gesture with his left hand. A wrinkle had appeared in one corner of the foretopsail. Then he looked round the horizon with a sailor’s far-seeing gaze, before replying.

‘Seemed to me,’ he mumbled, without

taking his pipe from his lips, 'that it was a revolver.'

Then the two men smoked in silence for some time. The little vessel moved steadily out towards the blue water, passing a lighthouse built upon a solitary rock, and later a lightship, with its clean red hull gleaming in the sunlight as it rose and fell lazily. So close were they to the latter that the man watching on deck waved his hand in salutation.

Still Vellacott had vouchsafed no reply to Captain Lebrun's strange statement. He sat on the low rail, swinging one leg monotonously, while the square little sailor stood at his side with that patient maritime reflectiveness which is being slowly killed by the quicker ways of steam.

'My calling brings me into contact with a

rum lot of people,' said the young fellow at last, ' and I suppose all of us make enemies without knowing it.'

With this vague elucidation the little skipper was forced to content himself. He gave a grunt of acquiescence, and walked forward to superintend the catheading of the anchor.

## CHAPTER XXVII

## IN THE RUE ST. GINGOLPHE AGAIN

ONE would almost have said that the good citizen Jacquetot was restless and disturbed. It was not that the little tobacco shop left aught to be desired in the way of order, neither had the tobacconist quitted his seat at the window-end of the counter. But he was not smoking, and at short intervals he drew aside the little red curtain and looked out into the quiet Rue St. Gingolphe with a certain eagerness.

The tobacconist was not in the habit of going to meet things. He usually waited for them to come to him. But on this particular

evening of September in a year which it is not expedient to name, he seemed to be looking out into the street in order that he might not be taken by surprise in the event of an arrival. Moreover he mopped his vast forehead at unnecessarily frequent intervals, just as one may note a snuff-taker have recourse to that solace more frequently when he is agitated than when a warm calm reigns within his breast.

‘So quiet—so quiet,’ he muttered, ‘in our little street—and in the others—who knows? It would appear that they have their shutters lowered there.’

He listened intently, but there was no sound except the clatter of an occasional cart or the distant whistle of a Seine steamer.

Then the tobacconist returned to the perusal of the ‘Petit Journal.’ Before he

had skimmed over many lines, he looked up sharply and drew aside the red curtain. Yes! It was someone at last. The footsteps were hurried and yet hesitating—the gait of a person not knowing his whereabouts. And yet the man who entered the shop a moment later was evidently the same who had come to the citizen Jacquetot when last we met him.

‘Ah!’ exclaimed the tobacconist. ‘It is you!’

‘No,’ replied the other. ‘It is not. I am not the citizen . . . Morot—I think you call it.’

‘But, yes!’ exclaimed the fat man in amazement. ‘You are that citizen, and you are also the Vicomte d’Audierne.’

The new-comer was looking round him curiously; he stepped towards the curtained door, and turned the handle.

'I am,' he said, 'his brother. We are twins. There is a resemblance. Is this the room? Yes!'

'Yes, monsieur. It is! But never was there such a resemblance.'

The tobacconist mopped his head breathlessly.

'Go,' said the other, 'and get a matress. Bring it and lay it on this table. My brother is wounded. He has been hit.'

Jacquetot rose laboriously from his seat. He knew now that this was not the Vicomte d'Audierne. This man's method was quite different. He spoke with a quiet air of command, not doubting that his orders would be obeyed. He was obviously not in the habit of dealing with the People. The Vicomte d'Audierne had a different manner of speaking to different people—this man, who resembled him so strangely, gave his

orders without heeding the reception of them.

The tobacconist was essentially a man of peace. He passed out of a small door in the corner of the shop, obeying without a murmur, and leaving the new-comer alone.

A moment later the sound of wheels awoke the peaceful stillness of the Rue St. Gingolphe. The vehicle stopped, and at the same instant the man passed through the little curtained doorway into the room at the back of the shop, closing the door after him.

The gas was turned very low, and in the semi-darkness he stood quite still, waiting. He had not long to wait; he had scarcely closed the door when it was opened again, and someone entered rapidly, closing it behind him. Then the first comer raised his arm and turned up the gas.

Across the little table, in the sudden flood of light, two men stood looking at each other curiously. They were so startlingly alike, in height and carriage and every feature, that there was something weird and unpleasant in their action—in their silence.

‘Ah !’ said the last comer. ‘It is thou. I almost fired !’

And he threw down on the table a small revolver.

‘Why have you done this?’ continued the Vicomte d’Audierne. ‘I thought we agreed sixteen years ago that the world was big enough to contain us both without meeting, if we exercised a little care.’

‘She is dead,’ replied the brother. ‘She died two years ago—the wife of Prangius—what does it matter now?’

‘I know that—but why did you come?’

‘I was ordered to Paris by the General.

I was near you at the barricade, and I heard the bullet hit you. Where is it ?'

The Vicomte looked down at his hand, which was pressed to his breast ; the light of the gas flickered, and gleamed on his spectacles as he did so.

' In my chest,' he replied. ' I am simply dripping with blood. It has trickled down my legs into my boots. Very hot at first—and then very cold.'

The other looked at him curiously, and across his velvety eyes there passed that strange contraction which has been noted in the glance of the Vicomte d'Audierne.

' I have sent for a mattress,' he said. ' That bullet must come out. A doctor is following me ; he will be here on the instant.'

' One of your Jesuits ? '

' Yes—one of my Jesuits.'

The Vicomte d'Audierne smiled and winced. He staggered a little, and clutched at the back of a chair. The other watched him without emotion.

‘Why do you not sit down?’ he suggested, coldly. ‘There are none of your—*People*—here to be impressed.’

Again the Vicomte smiled.

‘Yes,’ he said smoothly, ‘we work on different lines, do we not? I wonder which of us has dirtied his hands the most. Which of the two—the two fools who quarrelled about a woman. Ha? And she married a third—a dolt. Thus are they made—these women !’

‘And yet,’ said the Jesuit, ‘you have not forgotten.’

The Vicomte looked up slowly. It seemed that his eyelids were heavy, requiring an effort to lift them.

‘I do not like to hear the rooks call—that is all,’ he said.

The other turned away his soft, slow glance, the glance that had failed to overcome Christian Vellacott’s quiet defiance—

‘Nor I,’ he said. ‘It makes one remember.’

There was a short silence, and then the Jesuit spoke—sharply and suddenly.

‘Sit down, you fool!’ he said. ‘You are fainting.’

The Vicomte obeyed, and at the same moment the door opened and the tobacconist appeared, pushing before him a mattress.

The Jesuit laid aside his hat, revealing the tonsure gleaming whitely amidst his jetty hair, and helped to lay the mattress upon the table. Then the two men, the Provincial and the tobacconist of the Rue St. Gingolphe, lifted the wounded aristocrat gently and

placed him upon the improvised bed. True to his blood the Vicomte d'Audierne uttered no sound of agony, but as his brother began to unbutton the butcher's blouse in which he was disguised he fainted quietly. Presently the doctor arrived. He was quite a young man, with shifting grey eyes, and he saluted the Provincial with a nervous obsequity which was unpleasant to look upon. The deftness with which he completed the task of laying bare the wound was notable. His fingers were too clever to be quite honest. When, however, he was face to face with the little blue-rimmed orifice that disfigured the Vicomte's muscular chest, the expression of his face—indeed his whole manner—changed. His eyes lost their shiftiness—he seemed to forget the presence of the great man standing at the other side of the table.

While he was selecting a probe from his

case of instruments the Vicomte d'Audierne opened his eyes.

‘Ah !’ said the doctor, noting this at once. ‘You got this on the Boulevard ?’

‘Yes.’

‘How did you get here ?’ He was feeling the wounded man’s pulse now.

‘Cab.’

‘All the way ?’

‘Of course.’

‘Who carried you into this room ?’ asked the doctor, returning to his case of instruments.

‘No one ! I walked.’ The doctor’s manner, quick and nonchalant, evidently aggravated his patient.

‘Why did you do that ?’

He was making his preparations while he spoke, and never looked at the Vicomte.

‘In order to avoid attracting attention.’

This brought the doctor's glance to his face, and the result was instantaneous. The young man started and into his eyes there came again the shifty expression, as he looked from the face of the patient to that of the Provincial standing motionless at the other side of the table. He said nothing, however, and returned with a peculiar restraint to his preparations. It is probable that his silence was brought about by the persistent gaze of two pairs of deep velvety eyes which never left his face.

'Will Monsieur take chloroform,' he asked, unfolding a clean pocket-handkerchief, and taking from his waistcoat pocket a small phial.

'No!'

'But—I beg of you——'

'It is not necessary,' persisted the Vicomte, calmly.

The doctor looked across to the Provincial and made a hopeless little movement of the shoulders, accompanied by an almost imperceptible elevation of the eyebrows.

The Jesuit replied by looking meaningly at the small glass-stoppered bottle.

Then the doctor muttered :

‘As you will !’

He had laid his instruments out upon the mattress—the gas was turned up as high as it would go. Everything was ready. Then he turned his back a moment and took off his coat, which he laid upon a chair, returning towards the bed with one hand behind his back.

Quick as thought, he suddenly darted forward and pressed the clean handkerchief over the wounded man’s mouth and nose. The Vicomte d’Audierne gave a little smothered exclamation of rage, and raised his arms ; but

the Jesuit was too quick for him, and pinned him down upon the mattress.

After a moment the doctor removed the handkerchief, and the Vicomte lay unconscious and motionless, his delicate lips drawn back in anger, so that the short white teeth gleamed dangerously.

‘It is possible,’ said the surgeon, feeling his pulse again, ‘that Monsieur has killed himself by walking into this room.’

Like a cat over its prey, the young doctor leant across the mattress. Without looking round he took up the instruments he wanted, knowing the order in which they lay. He had been excellently taught. The noiseless movements of his white fingers were marvellously dexterous—neat, rapid, and finished. The evil-looking instruments gleamed and flashed beneath the gaslight. He had a peculiar little habit of wiping each one on his

shirt-sleeve before and after use, leaving a series of thin red stripes there.

After the lapse of a minute he raised his head, wiped something which he held in his fingers, and passed it across to the Provincial.

‘That is the bullet, my father,’ he said, without ceasing his occupation, and without raising his eyes from the wounded man.

‘Will he live?’ asked the Jesuit, casually, while he examined the bullet.

‘If he tries, my father,’ was the meaning reply.

The young doctor was bandaging now, skilfully and rapidly.

‘This would be the death of a dog,’ said the Provincial, as if musing aloud; for the surgeon was busy at his trade, and the tobacconist had withdrawn some time before.

‘Better than the life of a dog,’ replied the

Vicomte, in his smoothly mocking way, without opening his eyes.

It was very easy to blame one woman, and to cast reflections upon the entire sex. If these brothers had not quarrelled about that woman, they would have fallen out over something else. Some men are so ; they are like a strong spirit—light, and yet potent—that floats upon the top of all other liquids and will mingle with none.

It would seem that these two could not be in the same room without quarrelling. It was only with care that (as the Jesuit had coldly observed) they could exist in the same world without clashing. Never was the Vicomte d'Audierne so cynical, so sceptical, as in the presence of his brother. Never was Raoul d'Audierne so cold, so heartless, so Jesuitical, as when meeting his brother's scepticism.

Sixteen years of their life had made no difference. They were as far apart now as on one grey morning sixteen years ago, when the Vicomte d'Audierne had hurried away from the deserted shore of the Côte du Nord, leaving his brother lying upon the sand with an ugly slit in his neck. That slit had healed now, but the scar was always at his throat, and in both their hearts.

True to his training, the Provincial had not spoken the truth when he said that he had been ordered to Paris. There was only one man in the world who could order him to do anything, and that man was too wise to test his authority. Raoul d'Audierne had come to Paris for the purpose of seeing his brother—senior by an hour. There were many things of which he wished to speak, some belonging to the distant past, some to a more recent date. He wished to speak of

Christian Vellacott--one of the few men who had succeeded in outwitting him--of Signor Bruno, or Max Talma, who had died within pistol range of that same Englishman, a sudden voiceless death, the result of a terrible access of passion at the sight of his face.

But this man was a Jesuit and a d'Audierne, which latter statement is full of import to those who, having studied heredity, know that wonderful *inner* history of France which is the most romantic story of human kind. And so Raoul d'Audierne--the man whose power in the world is like that of the fires burning within the crust of the earth, unseen, immeasurable--and so he took his hat, and left the little room behind the tobacconist's shop in the Rue St. Gingolphe--beaten, frustrated.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

## THE MAKING OF CHRISTIAN VELLACOTT

‘MONEY,’ Captain Lebrun was saying emphatically, as the *Agnes and Mary* drifted slowly past Gravesend pier on the rising tide. ‘Hang money! Now, I should think that you make as much of it in a month as I do in a year. You’re a young man, and as far as I know ye, ye’re a successful one. Life spreads out before you like a clean chart. I’m an old ’un—my time is nearly up. I’ve lived what landsmen call a hard life, and now I’m slowly goin’ home. Ay, Mr. Vellacott, goin’ home! And you think that with all your manifold advantages you’re a happier

man than me. Not a bit of it! And why? 'Cause you belong to a generation that looks so far ahead that it's afraid of bein' happy, just for fear there's sorrow a comin'. Money, and lookin' ahead, that's what spoils yer lives now-a-days.'

The skipper emphasised these weighty observations by expectorating decisively into the water, and walked away, leaving Christian Vellacott with a vaguely-amused smile upon his face. It is just possible that Silas Lebrun, master and owner of the *Agnes and Mary*, was nearer the mark than he thought.

An hour later, Vellacott was walking along the deserted embankment above Westminster, on the Chelsea side of the river. It was nine o'clock, for which fact Big Ben solemnly gave his word, far up in the fog. The morning was very dark, and the street lamps were still alight, while every window

sent forth a gleam suggestive of early autumnal fires.

Turning up his own street he increased his pace, realising suddenly that he had not been within his own doors for more than four months. Much might have happened in that time—to change his life, perhaps. As he approached the house he saw a strange servant, an elderly woman, on her knees at the steps, and somehow the sight conveyed to his mind the thought that there was something waiting for him within that peaceful little house. He almost ran those last few yards, and sprang up the steps past the astonished woman without a word of explanation.

The gas in the narrow entrance hall was lighted, and as he threw aside his cap he perceived a warm gleam of firelight through the half-open door of the dining-room. He

crossed the carpeted hall, and pushed open that door.

Near the little breakfast-table, just under the gas, stood Hilda Carew. In *his* room, standing among *his* multifarious possessions, in the act of pouring from *his* coffee-pot. She was dressed in black—he noticed that. Instead of being arranged high upon her head, her marvellous hair hung in one massive plait down her back. She looked like a tall and beautiful school-girl. He had not seen her hair like that since the old days when he had been as one of the Carews.

As he pushed open the door, she looked up; and for a moment they stood thus. She set down the coffee-pot, carefully and symmetrically, in the centre of the china stand provided for its reception—and the colour slowly left her face.

‘ You have come back at last ! ’ she said,

quite monotonously. It sounded like a remark made for the purpose of filling up an awkward silence.

Then he entered the room, and mechanically closed the door behind him. She noticed the action, but did not move. He passed round the table, behind Aunt Judy's empty chair, and they shook hands conventionally.

'Yes,' he said, almost breathlessly; 'I am back; you do not seem elated by the fact.'

Suddenly she smiled—the smile that suggested, in some subtle way, a kitten.

'Of course—I am glad . . . to see you.'

In a peculiar dreamy way she began to add milk to the coffee. It seemed as if this were mere play-acting, and not real life at all.

'How is it that you are here?' he asked, with a broken, disjointed laugh. 'You can-

not imagine how strange an effect it was . . . for me . . . to come in and see you . . . here—of all people.'

She looked at him gravely, and moved a step towards him.

'Aunt Judy is dead!' she explained; 'and Aunt Hester is very ill. Mother is upstairs with them—*her*—now. I have just come from the room, where I have been since midnight.'

She stopped, raised her hand to her hair as if recollecting something, and stood looking sideways out of the window.

'There is something about you this morning,' he said, with a concentrated deliberation, 'that brings back the old Prague days. I suppose it is that I have not seen your hair as you have it to-day—since then.'

She turned quite away from his hungry gaze, looking out of the window.

After a pause she broke the silence—with infinite tact—not speaking too hurriedly.

‘It has been a terrible week,’ she said. ‘Mother heard from Mr. Bodery that they were very ill; so we came. I never dreamt that it was so bad when you spoke of them! Five years it has been going on?’

‘Yes; five years. Thank you for coming, but I am sorry you should have seen it.’

‘Why?’

‘Everyone should keep guard over his own skeleton.’

She was looking at him now.

‘You look very ill,’ she said curtly.  
‘Where have you been?’

‘I was kidnapped,’ he said, with a short laugh, ‘and then I got typhoid. The monks nursed me.’

‘You were in a monastery?’

‘Yes; in Brittany.’

She was idly arranging the cups and saucers with her left hand, which she seemed desirous of bringing under his notice; but he could look at nothing but her face.

‘Then,’ she said, ‘it would have been impossible to find you?’

‘Quite,’ he replied, and after a pause he added, in a singularly easy manner, ‘Tell me what happened after I disappeared.’

She did not seem to like the task.

‘Well—we searched—oh! Christian, it *was* horrid!’

‘I wondered,’ he said, in a deep soft voice, ‘whether you would find it so.’

‘Yes, of course, we *all* did.’

This did not appear to satisfy him.

‘But you,’ he persisted, ‘you, yourself—what did you think?’

‘I do not know,’ she answered with pain-

ful hesitation. ‘I don’t think I thought at all.’

‘Then what did you *do*, Hilda?’

‘I—oh, we searched. We telegraphed for Mr. Bodery, who came down at once. Then Fred rode over, and placed himself at Mr. Bodery’s disposal. First he went to Paris, then to Brest. He did everything that could be done, but of course it was of no avail. By Mr. Bodery’s advice everything was kept secret. There was nothing in the newspapers.’

She stopped suddenly, and there was a silence in the room. He was looking at her curiously, still ignoring that little left hand. Only one word of her speech seemed to have attached itself to his understanding.

‘Fred?’ he said. ‘Fred Farrar?’

‘Yes—my husband!’

He turned away—walked towards the

door, and then returned to the hearthrug, where he stood quite still.

'I suppose it was a quiet wedding,' he said in a hard voice, 'on my account; eh?'

'Yes,' she whispered.

He waited, but she added nothing.

Then suddenly he laughed.

'I have made a most extraordinary mistake!' he said, and again laughed.

'Oh, don't!' she exclaimed.

'Don't what?'

'Laugh.'

He came nearer to her—quite near, until his sleeve almost touched her bowed head.

'I thought—at St. Mary Western—that you loved me.'

She seemed to shrink away from him.

'What made me think so, Hilda?'

She raised her head, and her eyes flashed

one momentary appeal for mercy—like the eyes of a whipped dog.

‘Tell me,’ he said sternly.

‘It was,’ she whispered, ‘because *I* thought so myself.’

‘And when I was gone you found out that you had made a mistake?’

‘Yes; he was so kind, so *brave*, Christian—because he knew of my mistake.’

Christian Vellacott turned away, and looked thoughtfully out of the window.

‘Well,’ he said, after a pause, ‘so long as you do not suffer by it——’

‘Oh—h,’ she gasped, as if he were whipping her. She did not quite know what he meant. She does not know now.

At last he spoke again, slowly, deliberately, and without emotion.

‘Some day,’ he said, ‘when you are older, when you have more experience of

the world, you will probably fall into the habit of thanking God, in your prayers, that I am what I am. It is not because I am good . . . perhaps it is because I am ambitious—my father, you may remember, was considered heartless; it may be *that*. But if I were different—if I were passionate instead of being what the world calls cold and calculating—you would be . . . your life would be——’ he stopped, and turning away he sat down wearily in Aunt Judy’s arm-chair. ‘ You will know some day ! ’ he said.

It is probable that she does know now. She knows, in all likelihood, that her husband would have been powerless to save her from Christian Vellacott—from herself—from that Love wherein there are no roses but only thorns.

And in the room above them Aunt Hester was dying. So wags the world. There is

no attention paid to the laws of dramatic effect upon the stage of life. The scenes are produced without sequence, without apparent rhyme or reason; and Chance, the scene-shifter, is very careless, for comedies are enacted amid scenic effects calculated to show off to perfection the deepest tragedy, while tragedies are spoilt by their surroundings.

The doctor and Mrs. Carew stood at the bedside, and listened to the old woman's broken murmurings. Into her mind there had perhaps strayed a gleam of that Light which is not on the earth, for she was not abusing her great-nephew.

'Ah, Christian,' she was murmuring, 'I wish you would come. I want to thank you for your kindness, more especially to Aunt Judy. She is old, and we must make allowances. I know she is aggravating. It

happened long ago, when your father was a little boy—but it altered her whole life. I think women are like that. There is something that only comes to them once. I am feeling far from well, nephew Vellacott. I think I should like to see a doctor. What does Aunt Judy think? Is she asleep?’

She turned her head to where she expected to find her sister, and in the act of turning her eyes closed. She slumbered peacefully. The two sisters had slept together for seventy years—seventy long monotonous years, in which there had been no incident, no great joy, no deep sorrow—years lost. Except for the natural growth and slow decay of their frames, they had remained stationary, while around them children had grown into men and women and had passed away.

Presently Aunt Hester opened her eyes, and they rested on the vacant pillow at her side. After a pause she slowly turned her head, and fixed her gaze upon the doctor's face. He thought that the power of speech had left her, but suddenly she spoke, quite clearly.

'Where is my sister Judith?' she asked.

There are times when the truth must be spoken, though it kill.

'Your sister died yesterday,' replied the doctor.

Aunt Hester lay quite still, staring at the ceiling. Her shrivelled fingers were picking at the counterpane. Then a gleam of intelligence passed across her face.

'And now,' she said, 'I shall have a bed to myself. I have waited long enough.'

Aunt Hester was very human, although

the shadow of an angel's wing lay across her bed.

It was many years later that Christian Vellacott found himself in the presence of the Angel of Death again. A telegram from Hâvre was one day handed to him in the room at the back of the tall house in the Strand, and the result was that he crossed from Southampton to Hâvre that same night.

As the sun rose over the sea the next morning, its earliest rays glanced gaily through the open port-hole of a cabin in a large ocean steamer, still panting from her struggle through tepid Eastern seas.

In this little cabin lay the Jesuit missionary, René Drucquer, watching the moving reflections of the water, which played ceaselessly on the painted ceiling overhead. He

had been sent home from India by a kind-hearted army surgeon; a doomed man, stricken by a climatic disease in which there was neither hope nor hurry. When the steamer arrived in the Seine it was found expedient to let the young missionary die where he lay. The local agent of the Society of Jesus was a kind-hearted man, and therefore a faithless servant. He acceded to René Drucquer's prayer to telegraph for Christian Vellacott.

And now Vellacott was actually coming down the cabin stairs. He entered the cabin, and stood by the sick man's bed.

'Ah, you have come,' said the Frenchman, with that peculiar tone of pathetic humour which can only be rendered in the language that he spoke. 'But how old! Do I look as old as that, I wonder? And hard—yes, hard as steel.'

'Oh, no,' replied Vellacott. 'It may be

that the hardness that was once there shows now upon my face—that is all.'

The Frenchman looked lovingly at him, with eyes like the eyes of a woman.

'And now you are a great man, they tell me.'

Vellacott shrugged his shoulders.

'In my way,' he admitted. 'And you?'

'I—I have taught.'

'Ah! and has it been a success?'

'In teaching I have learnt.'

Vellacott merely nodded his head.

'Do you know why I sent for you?' continued the missionary.

'No.'

'I sent for you in order to tell you that I burnt that letter at Audierne.'

'I came to that conclusion, for it never arrived.'

'I want you to forgive me.'

Vellacott laughed.

‘I never thought of it again,’ he replied, heartily.

The priest was looking keenly at him.

‘I did not say “thou,” but “*you*,”’ he persisted gently.

Vellacott’s glance wavered; he raised his head, and looked out of the open port-hole across the glassy waters of the river.

‘What do you mean?’ he inquired.

‘I thought,’ said René Drucquer, ‘there might be someone else—some woman—who was waiting for news.’

After a little pause the journalist replied.

‘My dear Abbé,’ he said, ‘there is no woman in the whole world who wants news of me. And the result is, as you kindly say, I am a great man now—in my way.’

But he knew that he might have been a greater.

THE END

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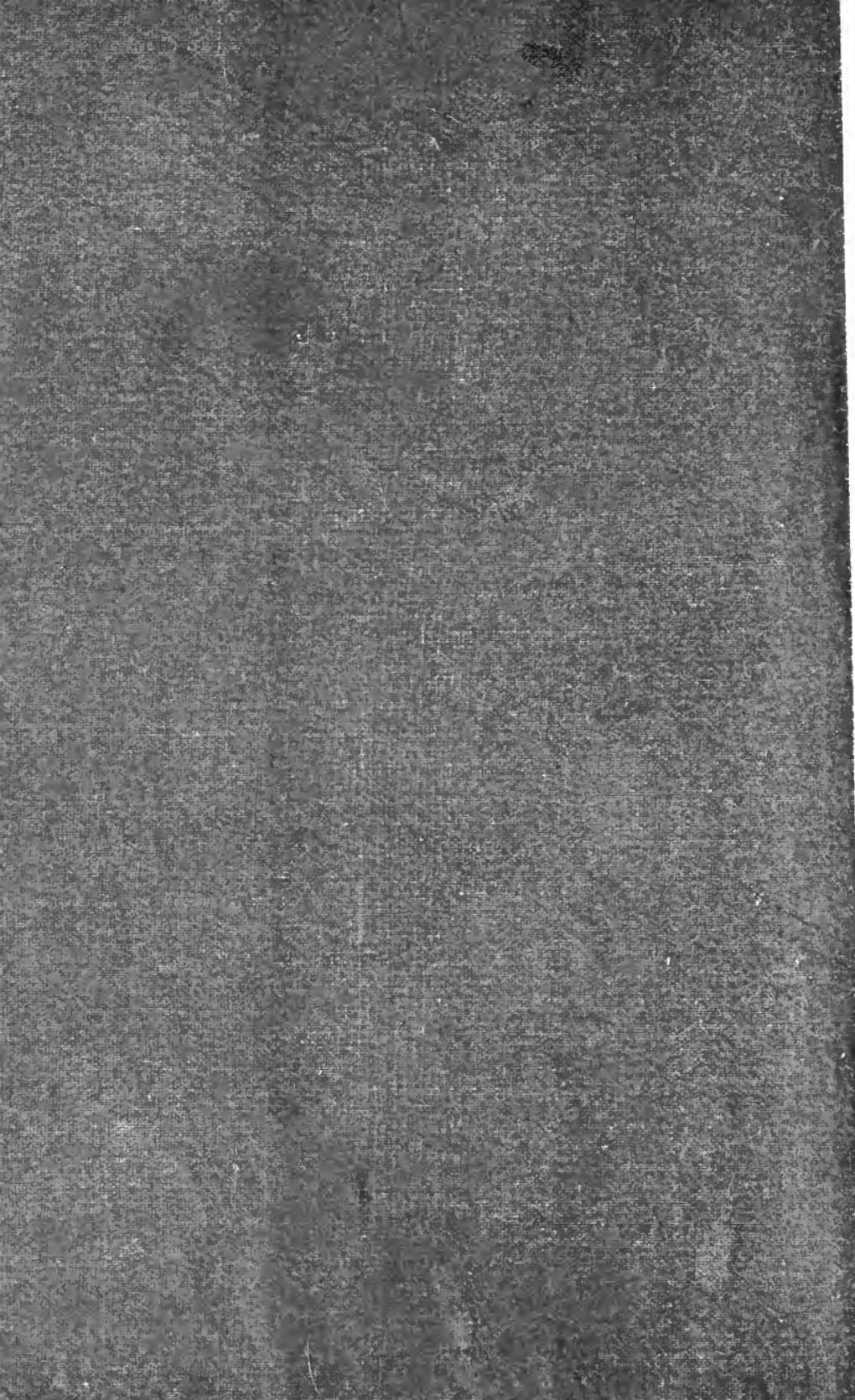
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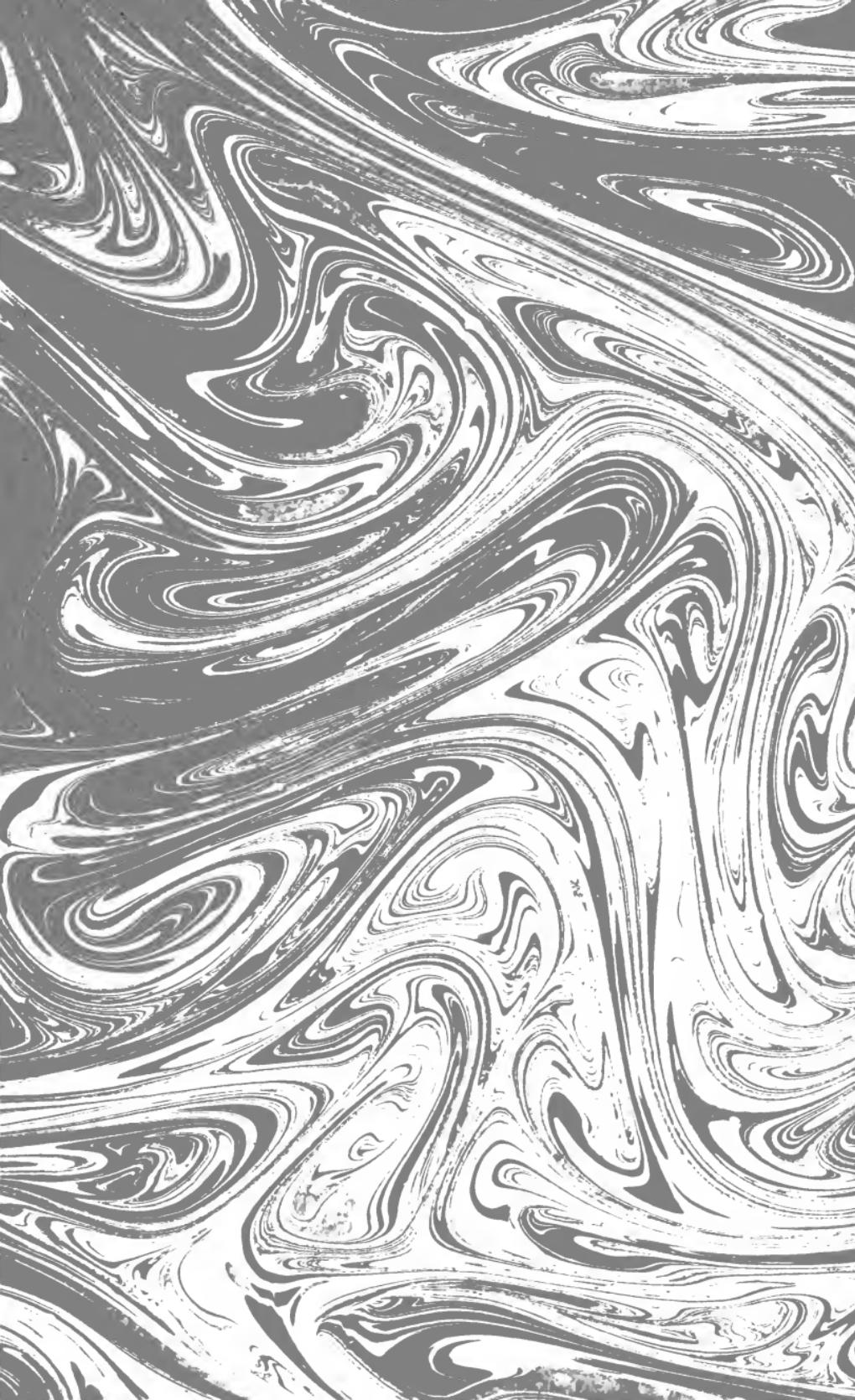












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